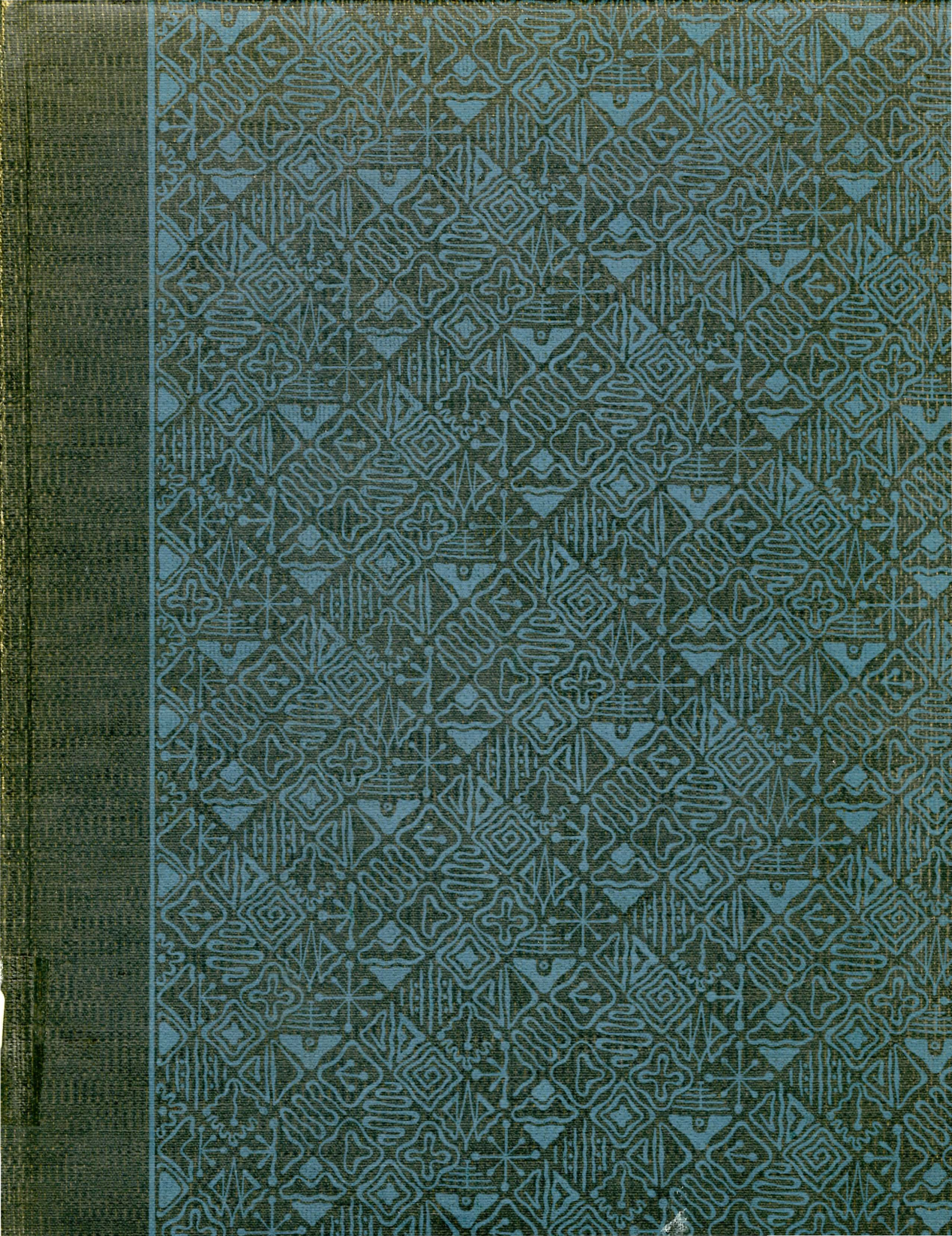




The Catholic University of America

CLAREL:

AN INVESTIGATION OF SPIRITUAL CRISIS

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and
Sciences of the Catholic University of America in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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CLAREL: AN INVESTIGATION OF SPIRITUAL CRISIS

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This dissertation was approved by Marius Bewley, Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature, as director, and by G. Giovannini and Richard Foley as readers. Copies of the complete dissertation are in the Mullen Library of the Catholic University of America.

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PREFACE

Critics of Herman Melville agree that the road from Mardi (1849) to The Confidence-Man (1857) was an eight-year struggle up an increasingly precarious hill of skepticism, disillusion, and pessimism. At this exhausting height he began Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land (1876), a poem which remains a problem in the interpretation of Melville.

With the publication of Clarel, Melville set before an uninterested public a protagonist eminently suited to the pattern which today is considered the type of the Melvillean hero. Clarel is, as Taji, Ahab, and to some degree Pierre, had been before him, the hero on a quest. But despite this similarity, the hero of the poem shares little of the vitality of the novels. Clarel as hero is a thin, pale figure wandering listlessly through wastes to an irresolute conclusion.

Aesthetic criticism must be justifiably hard on this, Melville's only sustained effort in verse. Melville himself set the pace when he wrote of it: ". . . a metrical affair, a pilgrimage or what not, of several thousand lines, eminently adapted for unpopularity."¹ Contemporary critics (Matthiessen, Thompson, Chase, Weaver, Howard) are unanimous in their adverse judgement. William Sedgwick and H. W. Wells stand almost alone in their attempt to represent Clarel as a successful work of art. Walter Bezanson, whose doctoral dissertation is the pioneer work on the poem, appraises it more highly than most critics, although his praise remains always judicious. While he commends the "high level of effort" in Clarel, he admits that the effort does not culminate in a successful achievement, adding,

¹Letter to James Billson, 1844, quoted in Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic (New York, 1921), p. 360.

"... there may be some who will prefer such values even when but half formed, to the conventional skill and nimble patter of most of Melville's contemporaries."²

Simultaneously, however, with their denunciation of Clarel as artefact, is the unanimous opinion of Melville critics that here more than anywhere else is an entrance into the "world of mind." Willard Thorpe indicates that Clarel is the key to the thought of Melville's later years. He adds, however, that it is a key only to those who are well versed in Melville's other works, for it is a very "private" poem whose esoteric symbolism will reward only the initiate. On this point most contemporary critics agree.³

However inimical the pallid quality of Clarel may seem to the robust prose which is considered typical of Melville, there can be no doubt of the value of the poem for an understanding of Melville's thought. Clarel rises out of the long, silent years to throw light on that dark period between The Confidence-Man and Billy Budd. The last scene of The Confidence-Man represented the extinguishing of the last light; hope and faith disappear in a world which had long since seen the disappearance of true charity. In such a world, a quest is futile, not merely because the world is in darkness but because there is nothing left to search for. Yet with the writing

²Walter Bezanson, Clarel (unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1943), p. iv.

³For contemporary opinion of Clarel, see F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), pp. 373-412; Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton, 1952), pp. 335-336; Richard Chase, Herman Melville, A Critical Study (New York, 1949), pp. 242-243; Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic (New York, 1921), p. 361; Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley, California, 1951), pp. 297-309; William Sedgwick, Herman Melville: Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Mass., 1944), pp. 201-202; H. W. Wells, "Melville's Clarel," College English, IV (1942), 474-483; Willard Thorpe, Herman Melville, Representative Selections (New York, 1938), p. lxxxix.

of Billy Budd, not only has sunrise come to a darkened world but now there is no need for quest. The object of man's search has been attained, and Billy can sleep secure the night before his execution. If a solution to this startling transition is to be found, it will be found in Clarel, which was published eighteen years after The Confidence-Man and thirteen years before the composition of Billy Budd.⁴

A careful analysis of the poem reveals seven major themes: the quest for truth, spiritual isolation, the dichotomy of head and heart, permanence and change, the problem of suffering and evil, asceticism and the natural man, the struggle for faith. It is through an explication of these basic themes that the total meaning of the poem will be found. For purposes of elucidation, this study has made use of the major novels whenever they seemed pertinent to the issues of the poem. Such treatment, it is hoped, will not only help to clarify certain ambiguities within the poem itself but also to determine the place it holds in the maturation of Melville's thought. It is through Clarel that insight may be had into those years which form the bridge between the nihilism of The Confidence-Man and the spiritual reconciliation of Billy Budd.

All references to Clarel and to Mardi are to the Constable edition (London, 1924); references to Melville's other works are to

⁴The date for the actual composition of Clarel is not easy to determine. Bezanson submits a reasonable hypothesis based upon the biographical details of the period, internal evidence from the poem itself, and what can be learned from source study. He concludes: "Bits of Clarel were written by 1859, a real start on the whole work was made between the fall of 1860 and the summer of 1863, and the rest of the first half was written in the evenings and weekends of 1867-1870; in the spring of 1870 Melville acquired his copy of Stanley's Sinai and Palestine and devoted most of his spare time in the next six years to the composition of the second half of the poem and the enormous job of revision." Bezanson, Clarel, p. 90.

the new Hendricks House edition (Moby Dick, 1942; Pierre, 1949; The Confidence-Man, 1955).

The writer wishes to express her gratitude to Mr. Marius Bewley whose zealous interest in Melville first prompted this study, to Dr. G. Giovannini whose interest and advice far surpassed his academic obligations, and to Dr. Richard Foley for his gracious reading of the manuscript. She also wishes to thank the librarians of the Library of Congress, the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library, the Mullen Library of The Catholic University of America, the Sarah Lawrence Library, and the Library of the College of New Rochelle.

Most of all, the author wishes to express her immeasurable gratitude for the interest and generosity of the Ursuline Community of New Rochelle to whom she owes far more than a preface can acknowledge.

CHAPTER I

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

For in this world of lies, Truth is
forced to fly like a scared white doe
in the woodlands; and only by cunning
glimpses will she reveal herself.
("Hawthorne and his Mosses")

An analysis of the quest for truth, the major structural theme in Clarel, involves a consideration of the object sought, the requisites for the quest, the postures of the various pilgrims, and the ultimate end of the quest.

These elements form a pattern which Melville had already employed in his preceding novels.¹ Mardi, Moby Dick, and to some extent Pierre, all share this structural device. The pattern as it operates in Clarel, however, is more palpable and, therefore, more accessible for analysis.

1. The Object of the Quest

In the poem, unlike the novels, the quest-land has an historical identity; the mythological archipelago of Mardi, and the chartless

¹Frank C. Griffith in discussing Mardi sets forth what he conceives to be the pattern of the quest--a pattern first established in Mardi and repeated in all of Melville's major works. "Tremendous as is the distance between this book (Mardi) and those which follow it, they are separated less by thematic differences than by the manner, the increased skill and understanding, with which the same is subsequently handled. Later, composing Moby Dick, Pierre, and even Clarel, Melville focused man's quarrel with his universe on particular problems, and so gave greater sharpness to the jumble of philosophical questions contained in Mardi. . . . The quest, the psychological attitudes of the questers, the alternatives to the quest, and, most especially, Melville's own involvement with what the quest signifies--all are now set down for the first time."

Although Griffith deals summarily with Clarel, I am indebted to him for corroborating in a general way my own ideas concerning thematic patterns and progression in Melville's work. Frank C. Griffith, Melville and the Quest for God (University of Iowa, dissertation on microfilm, 1952), pp. 84, 337.

whaling grounds of the Pacific are replaced by the Christian Holy Land of the nineteenth century.² Into this world of Christian symbolism, come, singly or in groups, the members of the caravan with which Clarel is concerned. There is a general tendency to describe the poem as a pilgrimage for faith. Such a phrase with its religious implications may lead to grave difficulty in interpreting Melville's meanings. Considering Clarel in terms of its religious locale and imagery the phrase is superficially appropriate. Such an interpretation, however, may be cutting the cloth a little too closely to a preconceived pattern. While it is true that Melville's mind never ceased pondering the problem of faith, this desire for "faith" represents only one segment of his total concern.³ What he sought, if we can judge from the reiterated theme of his works, was an understanding of the whole, a sort of comprehensive vision of the interrelated meanings of things.

²The motivation for Melville's interest in the Holy Land need not concern us. Bezanson adequately describes the increasing interest in the East in nineteenth century America. Archeological expeditions and missionary enterprises were in full force, and travel books on the Holy Land found an enthusiastic market. Bezanson describes Melville's reading along these lines, and in some cases attempts to show the influence of these works upon Melville's composition. Bezanson, Clarel, Chs. I and III, passim. See also Merton Sealts, Melville's Reading: A Checklist of Books Owned and Borrowed (Harvard University Press, 1950).

The primary source for the setting of Clarel, is, of course, Melville's own trip to Europe and the Near-East in 1856 and 1857. Throughout the journey he kept a diary of brief jottings on which he later drew for much of the material of his pilgrimage poem. The recent edition of this journal by Howard Horsford (Princeton University Press, 1955) provides valuable introduction and notes, and supersedes the valiant but often faulty edition of Raymond Weaver (New York, 1935).

³Concerning Melville's own attitude of mind, we find this significant passage in Hawthorne's notebooks: "... we took a pretty long walk together & sat down in a hollow among the sand hills. . . . Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence, & futurity, & of everything that lies beyond human ken. . . ." The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York, 1941), p. 432.

The characters in Clarel are not so much pilgrims as men on a quest.⁴ Their journey is not undertaken for the purposes of venerating accepted religious values, but in the hope of finding a set of values worthy of veneration. What precisely are the questers seeking?

The object of Clarel's quest is far less difficult to pinpoint than that of Melville's earlier protagonists. The creative process which had formed the multiple meanings of the novels operates in Clarel on only a pedestrian level. Yillah, the great white whale, Lucy and Isabel are replaced by a metaphysical reality abstractly stated. The flamboyant image of Pierre wrestling to lift the visor of the Black Knight, of Ahab who will strike through the pasteboard mask cost what it may, of Taji skimming his endless sea in pursuit of the phantom Yillah -- all these are replaced by a mild young man who reiterates rather too frequently that he wishes to face the "under-formings in the mind."⁵

⁴Clarel himself states his position in regard to faith in the canto in which he meets Nehemiah for the first time. The aged Evangelist asks him, "'A pilgrim art thou?'" To the simple question Clarel cannot give an unqualified response. To be a pilgrim is to be identified with specific religious values; the pilgrim seeks merely a concrete and temporal fulfillment of a spiritual ideal already possessed. This is not the case with Clarel; the "student of the sacred lore" has been left behind in favor of a quester who seeks not the provincial responses of sectarian faith but the larger issues of "primal doubts." The concise answer given to Nehemiah's question, with its implicit denial that he is a pilgrim, says all of this: "I am a traveller--no more." (I,37). As traveller he is free of system, free of domestic convention, and at liberty to observe and judge without prejudice or preconception.

⁵Clarel, I,5. Once again it is necessary to warn that the difference is one of imaginative conception, not of essential meaning. The color and adventure of the earlier novels are gone; gone, too, are the ambiguities. Reading Mardi and Moby Dick with the hindsight provided by Clarel is enlightening. The essentials of the quest remain the same, and it seems fairly safe to equate the beautiful Yillah and the great white whale with metaphysical truth--the whole truth sought by Clarel. This is not to reduce these complex symbols to the simple units found in Clarel: they remain, as Fabbalanja explains to Mohi, "a polysensuum." Relevant to this point is Griffith's discussion of the search for knowledge in Mardi and Moby Dick. Melville's Quest for God, pp. 80, 98-99, 174-175; see also Thorpe, p. lxxix, n. 107.

The object of Clarel's quest is stated in terms of its own metaphysical reality. He wishes to "learn and unlearn" (I,4), "woo remote conclusions" (I,159), escape from his "cultivated narrowness" (I,6). He is described in Canto I as a student

Earnest by nature, long confined
 Apart by Vesta in a grove
 Collegiate, but let to rove
 At last abroad among mankind. (I,6)

Clarel is impelled by a restlessness, a discontent with the provincial quality of his experience; he is weary of being tied to "one poor and casual form" (I,5). He is not stimulated by any personal tragedy; his quest is more preventive than remedial, and in this he is set apart from the usual Melvillean hero.⁶

The very indistinctness of his motivation, however, places Clarel at the very apex of the truth-quest. Like the other members of the caravan he is in search of a metaphysic capable of providing a full vision. It is in these terms that we must understand the quest for truth.

It is Clarel himself who asks two central questions which outline a pervasive epistemological problem in Melville's works.

Following a discussion of some famous Jewish thinkers who, though praised for their sincerity, are dismissed as men who failed to see

⁶ Here Clarel differs from Taji, whose quest is an effort to recapture what is lost, from Ahab, who is goaded on by deep personal pain, and even from Pierre, whose shoulders had felt the blow of tragedy before he vowed himself "all Virtue's and all Truth's." The closest analogue to the motivation of Clarel is found in *Mardi*, in the episode of the Fifth Pilgrim who journeys on with no specific object in view but only in obedience to the "divine instinct" in him. (II, ii, v, viii). Clarel's motivation also lacks concreteness, and this is one of the weaknesses of the poem. However, this very indefiniteness underscores one of the currents of Melville's thought: there are "salamander giants" who are instinct with restlessness, for whom a segment of reality will not suffice. There is no need of a specific stimulus to urge them in their diving, for the mystery of life is itself a stimulus. It is in this category that we must place Clarel.

clearly, Clarel asks:

And whose the eye that seems aright,
If any? (I,261)

Further on, he places another central question:

What may man know? (II,272)

These two questions may serve as pegs upon which to hang the problem of truth as it appears in Clarel.

May man know the whole vision of truth? This is the question which all of Melville's heroes--from Taji to Clarel--face with varying degrees of hope. The problem may be stated in the following terms:

1. is truth essentially inscrutable?
2. is truth accidentally inscrutable either because of a defect in the perceiving intellect, or because of external forces which keep the mind from its object?

Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre had already explored multiple facets of this problem without reaching an explicit conclusion.⁷ Of all Melville's preceding works, The Confidence-Man alone seems to state unequivocally that truth is no more than a series of protean guises, that behind the mask there is nothing to be known. After long agonized years of increased mental turmoil over the inscrutability

⁷In Mardi alone four questers live out four different responses: The Fifth Pilgrim is executed by religious authority before he can climb Ofo, the mountain of truth; Donjololo cannot escape from his world of illusion without abdicating his kingdom; Babbalanja compromises with a "penultimate vision," satisfied that only Oro can possess complete knowledge; Taji, undaunted, pursues his Yillah "over an endless sea."

These histories of the four pilgrims in Mardi suggest various facets of the problem of truth: is truth essentially inscrutable (the case of Taji and probably of Babbalanja), or is it accidentally inscrutable either because of a defect in the perceiving intellect (Donjololo) or because of external forces which keep the mind from its object (the Fifth Pilgrim). For further explication of the symbolic meanings of Donjololo and the Fifth Pilgrim, see Tyrus Hillway, "Taji's Quest for Certainty," American Literature, XVIII (1946), 27; Merrill Davis, Melville's "Mardi": A Chartless Voyage (New Haven, 1952), p. 151; Frank Griffith, Melville's Quest For God, p. 103.

of truth, Melville indicates in Clarel that a positive conclusion to the quest is possible. Even here, however, there is no touch of that facile optimism which believes that the generality of men will reach truth.⁸

In Mardi and in Moby Dick, Melville's essential concern seemed to be with the essentially inscrutable nature of truth. Thus Ahab, although face to face with the sperm whale, cannot capture him nor read the meanings in his brow. In Mardi, the philosopher Babbalanja, even when assumed into a sort of heaven, is faced with mysteries which even the blessed spirits can never unravel.⁹ In Clarel, however, the emphasis is placed not upon "What may man know?" but rather,

⁸ Melville was always aware that the number of men endowed with the heroic character necessary for the confrontation of pure truth was very few. In a letter to Evert Duyckinck, he wrote: "Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down-stairs five miles or more. . . ." (Thorpe, p. 372). Twice (once in Clarel and once in Moby Dick) he uses a mythological image to emphasize the perils of the quest for truth. The image is that of the veiled image of Sais which it was impossible for most men to behold unveiled without dying at the sight. (Clarel II, 76; Moby Dick, p. 336) The use of this image underscores the theory that the successful culmination of the quest is reserved for the heroic few, while the vast throng ruled by "King Commonplace" continue their unthinking way.

Walter Bezanson calls attention to a poem by Schiller, "The Veiled Image at Sais," which appeared in an edition translated by Bulwer Lytton. Melville's copy of this volume, now in the possession of Mrs. Osborne, has significant markings. (Poems and Ballads of Schiller, tr. Bulwer Lytton [Leipzig, 1844]). See Bezanson, Clarel, p. 72.

Two other significant passages concerning the dangers of the quest are found in Mardi, II, 2 and Pierre, p. 135.

⁹ Babbalanja's vision need not represent an unorthodox scepticism. The assumption that truth is by its very nature inscrutable to man is given symbolic form in the vision of Babbalanja. As the heavens of Serenia open before him, he is brought face to face with the fact that even in a paradisaal state there are truths reserved for Oro alone. This is essentially so, it is explained, since to know all would make men be like gods, and consequently to change the nature of the one and supreme God. Here it is a question of the deepest mystery, the mystery beyond all, and which is de essentia the proper possession of Oro alone. Such an explanation is well within the bounds of orthodox Christianity. Griffith in searching for the source of Melville's scepticism cites the influence of Montaigne and especially the article on Plotinus in Pierre Bayle's Dictionary. Griffith, Melville's Quest for God, pp. 100, 179-180.

upon the second of the hero's questions: "Whose the eye that sees aright. . . ?" In this later work Melville apparently assumed that truth is essentially knowable, and passes on to the more proximate difficulty of what defects in the perceiving intellect will effectively hinder man from reaching truth.

An analysis of the pilgrims indicates that the questing mind must have the ability to bring into focus contradictory elements. The duality of appearance and reality must be recognized and harmonized without sacrificing either of the composite elements. To implement this theme, Melville employs the city of Jerusalem and the Jordan desert as topographical symbols. As the doubloon in Moby Dick acted as a sounding board for the characters aboard the Pequod (ch. xcix), in Clarel the essential postures of the pilgrims are evoked by the land through which they travel.

Clarel, as the first step on his hunt, had turned inland from the seaport of Jaffa to the walled city of Jerusalem. With this primal symbolic action he plunges into a world of spiritual significances.¹⁰ The course of this spiritual journey takes him through Jerusalem, south to the Jordan desert and the Dead Sea, west to Bethlehem (with a stop at the Greek monastery of Mar Saba) and northward back to Jerusalem. This is a circular route of which Jerusalem forms the point of departure and return.¹¹ Although Melville uses

¹⁰Clarel's "inward turning" is analogous to Taji's desertion of the Arcturion, Ishmael's determination to ship aboard the Pequod, and Pierre's flight from the green illusion of Saddle Meadows to the unknown realities of the gray cobblestoned city. The closest imagistic parallel to Clarel's act is a minor episode in Mardi in which the pilgrims, upon landing at Maramma, learn that in order to visit the sacred shrines they must "journey inland" (II,9).

¹¹This was the route Melville followed on his own journey to the Holy Land. See his Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant, p. 134.

this course as a basic structural element and endows each of the major segments with some specific significance, the way itself was but the conventional route followed by the generality of pilgrims to the Holy Places.

Contemporary guide books as well as Melville's own Journal of his trip to the Holy Land are unanimous in describing the depressing state of the country with its ruin, sterility and desolation. The material landscape spread before them seem to belie in every aspect the conventional symbolism of Palestine as the Promised Land and the land of redemption.¹² It is this desolation which confronts Clarel as, on his first night in Jerusalem, he gazes upon the city from his room in Abdon's hostel:

... . The flow
Of eventide was at full brim;
Overlooked, the houses sloped from him--
Terraced or domed, unchimnied, gray,
All stone--a moor of roofs. No play
Of life; no smoke went up, no sound
Except low hum, and that half drowned.
... .
... . And here and there
In flaws the languid evening air
Stirs the dull weeds adust, which trail
In festoons from the crag, and veil

¹²William Bartlett, describing his first visit of the city, writes: "There was nothing grand or striking in the vision--a line of dull walls, a group of massive towers, a few dark olives, rising from a dead and sterile plain, were all that met the eye." This attitude is borne out by Dean Stanley who speaks of the "desolation and degradation" of pilgrims who have felt that in visiting Jerusalem they were visiting an "accursed city".

This weariness and distaste were also the sentiments of Melville as he wandered about the narrow alleys and desolate lanes of the city. In his journal he wrote: "No country will more quickly dissipate romantic expectations than Palestine--particularly Jerusalem. To some the disappointment is heart sickening. . . . In the emptiness of the lifeless antiquity of Jerusalem the emigrant Jews are like flies that have taken up their abode in a skull."

(William Bartlett, Walks about the City and Environs of Jerusalem London, 1844, p. 14; Arthur Penryn Stanley, Sinal and Palestine [New York, 1857], p. 192; William Thomson, The Land and the Book [New York, 1859], II, 467; Melville, Journal, p. 154.

The ancient fissures, overtopped
By the tall convent of the Copt,
Built like a light-house o'er the main. (I,7)

Here, certainly, the two levels of meaning--surface appearance and inner significance--are at first glance warring elements. It is, however, the harmonious ordering of these disparate factors which Melville proposes as the task of the seeker of truth. The full vision of truth must see both sides of the picture. It is not enough to ignore the surface ugliness and sterility nor to sentimentalize them; instead, they must be subsumed into a synthesis which acknowledges each as a component part. The true pilgrim will be aware of both sides of the coin: the material reality and the spiritual significance which together form the whole truth.

This duality of vision is a pervasive theme in Melville. In Mardi, the philosopher Babbalanja, following a romantically beautiful picture of the island of Porpheero, cries: "'A glorious picture. . . but turn the medal, my lord,--what says the reverse?'" (II,206) In Moby Dick, the narrator is not deceived by the calm blue of the sea, but looks beyond the surface to observe the horrors and brutality which take place in the depths--"the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying eternal war since the world began" (p. 274).¹³ In The Confidence-Man, the darkest of Melville's novels, the theme is raised to structural proportions, for the whole plot is, as the title suggests, merely a series of false postures, a "masquerade."

The device operates in Clarel inversely, however, for while the characters in the preceding novels found ugliness or pain beneath a surface beauty, the pilgrims of Clarel must perceive beneath the

¹³ The recurring image of brute evil hidden beneath the tranquil surface of the sea is discussed in Griffith, Melville's Quest for God, pp. 89-101.

sterility and decay of the Holy Places life and spiritual illumination. The use which Melville makes of the desert is the most sustained example of his manipulation of a topographical symbol. As the cavalcade passes through the gates of Jerusalem, it descends the road to Jericho toward the Dead Sea. This descent into truth--a repeated figure in Melville--is in this instant literally true.¹⁴ Here, as in Jerusalem, the surface appearance is one of sterility, desolation, and loneliness:

For Judah here--
 Let Erebus her rival own;
 'Tis horror absolute--severe,
 Dead, livid, honeycombed, dumb, fell--
 A caked depopulated hell;
 Yet so created, judged by sense,
 And visaged in significance
 Of settled anger terrible.
 Profoundly cloven through the scene
 Winds Kedron--word (the scholar saith)
 Importing anguish hard on death. (I,217)

But the indication that there are other values besides these superficial ones is suggested by means of the established symbolic value of the desert. For the Jew, the desert was a place of revelation, of miracle, of spiritual enlightenment. Such connotations accrued from a long and symbolic historical past in which deserts

¹⁴This image is a favorite one with Melville. It appears three times in *Moby Dick*: in the Hotel de Cluny figure (p. 183) in Ahab's appeal to the whale-head for the secret "thing that is in thee," and in little Pip's terrible descent through the sea to that wisdom which he found on the ocean's floor (p. 413). It appears also in *Pierre* in terms of the geologist who mined through the surface of the earth to find what may be hidden there. This iterated image gives significant implementation to the theme of reality and appearance which is a necessary element of Melville's concept of truth.

figured as important elements.¹⁵ The desert about the Jordan is peculiarly rich in symbolic events: here Elias and his disciple Eliseus had lived and wrought their miracles, and later, John the Baptist, that second Elias, had prepared in solitude for his great prophetic vocation. Jesus Himself had gone into the desert for His fast of forty days and forty nights, emerging for His baptism of penance at the Jordan. All of these episodes underscore the meaning of the desert as a place of quest and as a favorable locale for the manifestation of divine truth. It is precisely through such areas of desolation that the truth-quest must go, mindful that what is sought is reality, not appearance. It is a land "Direful yet holy--blest tho' banned," and to the sincere seeker it will not refuse that sustenance of truth on which his spiritual life depends. This is what the narrator suggests when he comments:

And John, he found wild honey here. (I, 217)

2. Requisites for the Quest

This capacity to recognize the dual aspect of things acts as a dividing line between the pilgrims. Derwent, Margoth, the Greeks, the Cypriote, the Lyonesse--all, in one way or another, limit their vision to a preconceived pattern and, as a consequence, forego the possibility of a complete vision. Vine, Rolfe, Celio, Mortmain,

¹⁵Dorothy Donnelly discusses basic symbolic meanings of desert as they appear in folklore and literature (The Golden Well, [New York, 1950], p. 91).

For forty years the Israelites wandered through the desert in search of the Promised Land; the bride of the Canticle of Canticles wandered through the desert seeking her beloved; the prophet Osee had said, speaking for God, "Come apart into a desert place and I will speak to thy heart." William Jenks' Commentary on the Bible, one of the most popular Biblical tools of the mid-nineteenth century and one with which Melville was undoubtedly acquainted, suggests that desert had usually the connotation of solitude, is often emblematic of spiritual things, and is the scene of desolation, temptation, persecution, etc. William Jenks, Comprehensive Commentary to the Bible (Brattleboro, Vermont, 1838).

Ungar, Agath, Clarel, whatever may be the personal result of their quest for truth, demonstrate, at least, a capacity for total vision.

Despite individual motivations and achievements, three basic conditions must be met by all earnest seekers: (1) the quester must be willing to forsake his known ordinary world, (2) he must turn inward to a world of spiritual values, (3) he must not remain static.

The first requisite, the withdrawal from a known world, is a step which all the pilgrims have achieved by virtue of their act of pilgrimage.¹⁶ They are necessarily men on a journey, men in a strange world far from accepted commonplaces. The second step, that of an "inward turning" is accomplished by Clarel in his symbolic action of turning from the fertile seaport of Jaffa to survey the sterility and decay of the inland city of Jerusalem. Thus, as Mardi became a "world of mind" (II, 277), Palestine becomes both macrocosm and microcosm, the nineteenth century universe and the soul of man. The third requisite, the dynamic activity of the quester, stems from the dynamic and infinite nature of truth itself, a point which Melville had already suggested in the infinitude of the quest in the endless journeyings of Taji and the unsatisfied probings of Pierre.

¹⁶ Jerusalem is a city of travelers; none of those who wander like shades through Clarel is in a real sense "native" to Jerusalem. That is obviously true of those who are there for pilgrimage, but it is also true of those who at first glance would seem to be residents; Nathan and Agar have left the New World to follow a vision, but they never succeed in establishing a lasting home; Nehemiah, too, although he has lived long in the city, is a stranger who has been called by his spiritual dreams to an alien soil; Abdon, inn-keeper though he is, has himself but recently come to this central city that he may die in the land of his forefathers. Bezanon, in discussing Melville's concept of the tragic hero, emphasizes the necessity of this isolation of soul: "In the solution of his problems he must stand alone, even though oppressed by great loneliness, for family, government, and church alliances necessitate compromises he must not make." Bezanon, Clarel, p. 255.

3. The Postures of the Pilgrims

Bearing in mind these three general requisites, we may turn to see the specific form they assume in the individual questers. Five basic attitudes toward truth evolve from an analysis of the pilgrims: (1) the attitude of repudiation represented by the Greeks and the Presbyter; (2) the attitude of monism presented by Derwent and Margoth; (3) the attitude of eclecticism presented by Rolfe; (4) the attitude of passivity presented by Vine; (5) the attitude of unremitting search presented by Celio and Mortmain. It is significant that the hero himself does not fit into any of these classifications. While it is evident that Clarel would like to be a member of the last group--the group which alone achieves success on the quest--he does not actually fulfill the requirements of this heroic position. Despite his desires, he clings to the comfort of a known world and human love as we shall see at length in Chapter VI.

The posture of the first group is the most direct and the least important: these are the men who return to land with the pilot's boat. The first difficult miles of the pilgrimage suggests to both the Greeks and the Presbyter that they may find on this journey what they do not wish to find, and this is sufficient reason for them to desert the quest. The truth they are seeking is a preconception anomalous to the whole vision. The Greeks with their pack train, their paniers of wine, their sumptuous dress (I, 174), are the voluptuaries for whom ugliness or pain erects an insuperable barrier to truth. The first suggestion of this attitude is provided in Canto iii of Part II. When the subject of death is introduced, the elder Greek comments that "a well-bred man counts it unclean" to speak openly of such a topic, adding:

"Sir, change the topic.--Would 'twere done,
This scheme of ours, and we clean gone
From out this same dull land so holy
Which breeds but blue and melancholy." (I, 183)

In Canto xii, the physical difficulty of the pilgrimage for the florid Greek banker suggests that for the self-indulgent, the descent toward truth is always arduous. Rolfe comments that the journey affords but "sorry cheer for Mammon," and then expatiates by means of an interesting simile:

. . . . Ill would it accord
If Nabob with asthmatic breath
Lighted on Holbein's Dance of Death
Sly slipped among his prints from Claude. (I, 219)

The final act of repudiation of the quest for truth occurs when the Greeks leave the pilgrimage to join a Turkish caravan journeying northward to Jerusalem.

The case of the Presbyter follows the same pattern, although the character of his preconception is diametrically opposed to that of the Levantines. His view of truth permits no alleviation from the harsh, dark rule of the Grampian Kirk. All laughter, all song, all innovation is beyond his vision. When St. Paul is offered to him as representing a more moderate view, he replies, "Saint Paul, sir, had not zeal enough," (I, 211). As "Sir Crab" departs in anger, Rolfe suggests, "He and the desert don't agree" (I, 211). In so far as the desert symbolizes divine revelation this is exactly the case: the Elder wants only that truth which he has already fashioned to his own image and likeness.

The second attitude to truth is presented by Derwent and Margoth. This attitude is defined as a kind of monism which subjects all reality to a single, narrow focus. Self-deception is the basic defect which keeps both these pilgrims from achieving the vision of

truth. The liberal Anglican clergyman may be grouped with the atheist geologist, for, despite the dissimilarity of their thought, their posture to truth has a basic likeness. With Derwent, this deception stems from a kind of cowardice which refuses to see anything unpleasant; with Margoth it is a subconscious deception based upon a pride of intellect.¹⁷ Both of them set up a system of values which operates as an ultimate criterion. For Margoth, the system is a materialism based on the physical sciences; for Derwent it is a philosophic optimism. In both cases reality is shaven down until it can fit smoothly into the system. There is in this attitude more subtlety than in that of the Greeks and the Presbyter, who fled an alien vision. Derwent and Margoth--Derwent in particular--are more dangerous opponents, for they do not flee from truth but deform it for their own ends.

Derwent is not unaware that opposites, apparently irreconcilable, exist, but his "genial heart" prefers to deny the existence of anything which does not fit into his neatly patterned system. As Rolfe and Derwent discuss the wild pessimism of Ungar, the expatriot American, the clergyman cautions: "No balm he'll find in that unhappy vein" (II, 254). And he continues to explain that even though Ungar's strictures on modern life may be true, they are unprofitable.

¹⁷For Melville, the presence of a more or less induced self-deception is always a danger. Striking instances of this are found in *Mardi*, in the episode of King Normo's slave Willi who, though perfectly obedient, refused to admit his servile status (II, 129); in *Pierre* in the symbolic scene in which the hero searches vainly for the Plinlimmon pamphlet which is all the while contained on his person. The narrator's comment on this last episode is illuminating for the whole theme: "And here it may be randomly suggested, by way of bagatelle, whether some things that men think they do not know, are not for all that thoroughly comprehended by them; and yet, so to speak, though contained in themselves, are kept a secret from themselves" (p. 346).

"Man has two sides: keep on the bright" is Derwent's facile conclusion, which he manages to maintain even in the face of Rolfe's insistence that one must face the "truth."¹⁸

Derwent is diametrically opposed to Melville's "thought-divers"; his gift is for "light disposings," an ability to skim (I, 255). His optimistic philosophy offers him an easy gaiety which in itself provides a condemnation of his attitude toward truth. Derwent's answer to Clarel's impassioned questions is "too deep you dive" (II, 109). Salamander giants who plumb the depths have no place in the clergyman's philosophy which but echoes the deists of the eighteenth century:

The surface, ah, heaven keeps that green;
Green, sunny: nature's active scene,
For man appointed, man's true home. (II, 109)

Derwent, so genial among men, so affable in the sunshine of the commonplace world, is painfully ill at ease in the desert of revelation. The judgement on such a position is passed by Clarel himself as he reviews the tendency to gloss suffering or ugliness, the ability to temporize, the imperious need to reduce reality to a facile synthesis:

. . . . Could Derwent, having gained
A certain slant in liberal thought,
Think there to bide, like one detained
Half-way down the slippery glacier caught? (I, 308)

Derwent's attitude is condemned as singularly perilous.

The attitude of Margoth needs little analysis, since it is obviously regarded as false. The Wilderness holds no terror for

¹⁸ Bezanson explains Derwent's philosophy as a "position of compromise." "With Derwent, compromise means the easy acceptance of the world, with which he has no quarrel. Apparently unperturbed by the deeper issues of belief and doubt, he steers a middle course, hoping that the goodness in God, man, and nature will all work for the best. . . . Derwent's optimism comes not from an inherent blindness to the pain and evil of the world, but from his determination to pay attention only to what is pleasant." Bezanson, Clarel, pp. 277, 283-284.

Margoth precisely because he fails to comprehend its meaning. Margoth's "truth" consists in a reinterpretation of the world in terms of geology. Legend, historic fact, religious doctrine must all be submitted to the geologist's hammer. Quarantania, the mountain of Christ's temptations, is no longer assessed in terms of its religious significance but as a possible subject for a learned monograph on Jura limestone (I, 247). At the Dead Sea he attempts a geologic explanation of the condition of the water and the surrounding terrain which will discount the scriptural and legendary account. In answer to Rolfe's reference to the damned cities, he replies:

"Tut, tut--tut, tut. Of aqueous force,
 Vent igneous, a shake or so,
 One here perceives the sign--of course;
 All's mere geology, you know.

 Touch, taste--all senses in assent
 Of common sense their parliament.
 Judge now; this lake, with outlet none
 And into which five streams discharge
 From south; which east and west is shown
 Walled in by Alps along the marge;
 North, in this lake, the waters end
 Of Jordan--end here, or dilate
 Rather, and so evaporate
 From surface." (I, 310)

Even death is construed as chemical change, for as the awed pilgrims gather around the body of Nehemiah, Margoth interpolates:

"He's gone, . . . czars, stars must go
 Or change! all's chemistry. Aye so." (I, 329)

Margoth is the nineteenth century scientist distorted into caricature.¹⁹

Rolfe's eclecticism represents the third attitude toward truth, and is at the other pole from the ideal of false synthesis repre-

¹⁹Melville seems to have had a specific interest in geology. In Mardi, a chapter is devoted to a fantastic theory of geology which explains the structure of the Mardian archipelago (Mardi, II, 109-113). See also Elizabeth Foster's article, "Melville and Geology," American Literature, XVII (1945), 50-65.

sented by the clergymay and the scientist. Rolfe is essentially the speculative man.²⁰ His mind is vigorous and alert; his experience and learning are vast. To the provincially trained Clarel his thought seems like a "Bagdad caravan," "a wildering throng" (I, 129). No system of thought seems foreign to Rolfe, whose peculiar capacity enables him to absorb conflicting philosophies without an awareness of their inconsistency. He makes no attempt to resolve inconsistencies but explores with purely speculative interest the various problems and solutions which present themselves. At one moment he seems to be sincerely impressed by the Catholic theological position delineated by the Dominican friar (I, 271-277) and at the next to champion a total skepticism (II, 85).

Rolfe possesses to a high degree that freedom from preconception which is the first necessary attitude of the pilgrim in search of truth; nevertheless, he is severely hampered by his inability, or unwillingness, to evaluate the evidence surrounding him. Sincere as Rolfe's efforts seem, they are impeded by a lack of any constant norm. It is this which Clarel finds so bewildering as he muses:

Surely I would not think a wrong;
Nor less I've shrunk from him in moods.
A bluntness is about him set:
Truth's is it? But he winneth yet
Through taking qualities which join.
Make these the character? the rest
But rim? On Syracusan coin
The barbarous letters shall invest
The relieve's infinite of charm.--
I know not. Does he help, or harm? (I, 214)

Rolfe's ability to defend, successively, contradictory positions, his sudden shifts from high seriousness to almost vulgar levity, his quick responsiveness, and apparent indifference are qualities which

²⁰ Bezanson develops the thesis that Rolfe is to be identified with Melville and Vine with Hawthorne. Bezanson, Clarel, pp. 171, 175.

Clarel cannot reconcile.

In the canto, "The Easter Fire," Rolfe assumes a position of complete skepticism.²¹ The effect on Clarel is devastating:

Revulsions came: with lifted brows
He gazed on Rolfe: Is this the man
Whom Jordan heard in part espouse
The appeal of that Dominican
And Rome? and here, all sects, behold,
All creeds involving in one fold
Of doubt? Better a partisan!
Earnest he seems: can union be
'Twixt earnestness and levity?
Or need at last in Rolfe confess
Thy hollow, Manysidedness! (II, 85)

For the pilgrim in search of truth, "manysidedness" is not in itself sufficient; it may be not even an unqualified good. The truth for which the quester must seek consists not only in seeing the realities of things as they are, but in seeing them meaningfully, in relation to a total pattern. Rolfe's "realism" is often fragmentary, concerning itself with parts rather than wholes. As Derwent praises the delicate formation of the Greek cross at Mar Saba, Rolfe retorts:

"I do but mean
'Tis not the cross of Calvary's scene.
The Latin cross (by that name known)
Holds the true semblance; that's the one
Was lifted up and knew the nail;
'Tis realistic--can avail!" (II, 91)

Rolfe obviously misses the symbolism which a more sensitive mind would have perceived. For him, it is the outward form which is of major significance. It will be remembered that it was Rolfe who succumbed to the fake charm of the oasis in the desert (I, 230). Rolfe with his vast and crowded mind attempts no harmony. His truth

²¹ Rolfe seems to represent a Pyrronic skepticism as it is defined by Pierre Bayle: "Pyrrho found on all occasions reasons to affirm and deny, for which reason he suspended his assent. . . . He sought truth all his lifetime; but he always so contrived matters, as never to grant that he had found it. . . . The art of disputing on all things, and always suspending one's judgement is called Pyrrhonism." Quoted in Griffith, Melville's Quest for God, p. 53.

consists of disparate elements following each other in turbulent succession. Rolfe fails to "woo conclusions"--an error as dangerous as to force conclusions.

The fourth attitude toward truth, that represented by Vine, is the most difficult to analyze.²² Whereas Rolfe represented the speculative man, Vine represents the artistic man. The learning and knowledge of the world which had distinguished the former is unimportant for Vine. He is essentially the man of feeling, deeply sensitive to beauty, to pain, to ugliness. It is not without significance that he is first discovered at the Sepulchre of Kings, "a waste where beauty clings" (I, 110). Here Ruth and Clarel come upon him as he gazes intently, "with meditative mien," upon the ancient tracery of the tomb. Vine's essentially artistic nature is emphasized by his choice of song during the revel of Mar Saba; he agrees to sing something which he had heard an "artist trill one morning fine" in his garret in Florence:

"What is beauty? 'tis a dream
Dispensing still with gladness:
The dolphin haunteth not the shoal,
And deeps there be in sadness.

The rose-leaves, see, disbanded be--
Blowing, about me blowing;
But on the death-bed of the rose
My amaranths are growing." (II, 70)

Vine says nothing of himself, nor does he participate in the discussions of the other pilgrims. He is aware of this isolation, and asks himself at one point:

²²Bezanson identified Vine with Hawthorne. He is gentle, shy unobtrusive, but with great moral strength which comes from his "complete mastery of his own rich nature." His maturity has armed him against the calamities of life. All of these qualities plus the relationship between Vine and Clarel suggest that the portrait of Vine stems from Melville's friendship with Hawthorne. Bezanson, Clarel, pp. 176-180.

be understood by those who have read the poem. "And is it I
(He muses), I that leave the others,
Or do they leave me?" (II, 126)

The multiple speculations of Derwent and Rolfe have little interest for him, and even in the lengthy argument carried on with the Dominican friar, he remains silent (I, 271-277). Following the debate concerning science and religion, Vine's general attitude toward such discourses is delineated:

For Vine, from that unchristened earth
Bit he picked up of porous stone,
And crushed in fist: or one by one,
Through the dull void of desert air,
Tossed them into valley down;
Or pelted his own shadow there;
Nor sided he with anything:
By fits, indeed, he wakeful looked;
But, in the main, how ill he brooked
That weary length of arguing--
Like tale interminable told
In Hades by some gossip old
To while the never-ending night. .
Apart he went. . . . (II, 25)

Discursive reasoning is not his means for arriving at truth, for Vine's peculiarly sensitive and gifted nature gives him a capacity for an intuitive truth. Melville in his review of Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse attempted to analyze that quality which is essential to great art. Taking Shakespeare as a norm, he writes: ". . . it is these deep far-away things in him; those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality--these are the things that make Shakspeare, Shakspeare."²³

This concept of an intuitive truth provides the chief clue to Vine's position in the truth-quest. Intuitive truth is the truth of the mystics; it can neither be apprehended by human reasoning nor successfully articulated by the one possessing it. This is what can

²³"Hawthorne and His Mosses." Thorpe, p. 334.

be understood by those two lines describing Vine:

The riches in them be a store
Unmerchanted in the ore. (I, 131)

This supra-rational apprehension of truth is further implemented by the canto, "Of Rama" (I, 130-131), whose verses suggest that Vine bears within him a strain of divinity, although he himself may not be aware of his heritage:

That Rama whom the Indian sung--
A god he was, but knew it not;
Hence vainly puzzled at the wrong
Misplacing him in human lot.

.

Such natures, and but such, have got
Familiar with strange things that dwell
Repressed in mortals; and they tell
Of riddles in the prosiest lot. (I, 130-131)²⁴

This, then, accounts for his peculiar loneliness, his strength and integrity, as well as for his capacity for harmonizing what to the less perceptive would be disparate or even contradictory truths.²⁵

He alone can face with tranquillity the ultimate truth of death; the discovery of Nehemiah's body at the shore of the Dead Sea "scarce shocked the soul" of Vine, for whom death was no new mystery:

To him, indeed, each lapse and end
Meet--in harmonious method blend.
Lowly he murmured, "Here is balm:
Repose is snowed upon repose--
Sleep upon sleep; it is the calm
And incantation of the close." (I, 328)

Vine's "harmonious" method is more of a natural gift than an

²⁴ Rama is one of the most famous avatars of the Indian god, Vishnu. His story is told in the Indian epic, the Ramayana. The application of this interpolated canto is ambiguous (II, 130). It is preceded by a discussion of both Rolfe and Vine, and the narrator never explicitly states to which of these it applies. The meanings of the canto, however, seem to apply to Vine. cf. Bezanson (p. 171) who takes the opposite point of view.

²⁵ Vine often sees, even in the physical order, what is not immediately perceived by the other pilgrims: the monk on Quarantania, Nehemiah transfigured in prayer, the dead body of Nehemiah (Clarel, I, 229, 288, 327).

achievement, for throughout the quest his constant reaction is one of passivity, of a reticent but sensitive acceptance. Thus he lacks that dynamic quality which has already been suggested as a necessary requisite for the seeker.

The fifth posture, represented by Celio and Mortmain, represents the most perfect attitude toward truth.²⁶ This is the attitude of the man who is unconditionally dedicated to "what IS."

With Celio and Mortmain, general unrest has been sharpened to a stimulus by disappointment and frustration. The latter is driven by the "mystery of iniquity," the selfish vacillation and hypocrisy which he has found in all men; the former is faced with the mystery of pain within himself. Physically deformed, victim of an unrequited love and of ambitions which his physical state and his insensitive family make impossible of attainment, Celio feels that this world has "failed" him. Yet he still hopes to find "some other world" which will provide a solution to the "negation" which is all his past experience has provided (I, 49).

Having broken with his family, his homeland, that Bice whom he loved, and the Roman Catholicism in which he was reared, he now attempts to face the historic facts of religion with an unjaundiced eye. This is not easy for one with a full religious heritage. He often responds instinctively to religious symbols despite his resolution to seek solution only on the "primal ground laid bare by

²⁶Ungar is not included in the category since he is driven upon the pilgrimage more in hope of fleeing from an evil than of finding a good. Deeply scarred, symbolic of an inner wound, Ungar has turned in bitter frustration from the selfish and senseless brutality of America's Civil War. Although he is one of the most significant voices of the poem, he is tangential to the actual quest theme; Ungar's journey is a sickened turning from with little interest in what he is turning toward. It is this indifference to a goal which provides the essential distinction between Ungar and Mortmain, whose potentialities and attitudes are similar in so many respects.

faith's receding wave" (I, 85). Despite this courageous beginning, death cuts short Celio's quest, and Mortmain alone remains the protagonist of pure truth.

Although Mortmain was goaded into his quest by personal disappointment, his quest transcends such a motive. The vision he seeks is not merely an explanation of his private woes but an answer to the endemic weltschmerz of human life. His imperious need for truth drives him to forsake the pilgrimage and plunge alone into the desert.²⁷ He abandons all conventionalities and

Bursting through every code and ward
Of Civilization, masque and fraud,
Takes the wild plunge. (I, 236)

He is the man of the "everlasting Nay" as Melville had described him in a letter to Hawthorne:

He says NO! in thunder; but the devil himself cannot make him say yes. For all men who say yes, lie; and all men who say no, why they are in the happy condition of judicious, unencumbered travellers in Europe; they cross the frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpet-bag,--that is to say, the Ego.²⁸

The passion of Mortmain's search undermines his body, and, as he emerges from his lonely desert vigil, gaunt and dark, he is described as looking like "Hecla ice inveined with marl." (I, 313). Through all his days of isolation, he has overcome his last fear of human suffering, and, now, maddened to a single purpose, he drinks the water of the Dead Sea, the waters of desolation, as the other pilgrims watch in horror and the Bethlehemite guide sings:

²⁷ A similar attitude of preparing the soul for the ultimate mystery by relinquishing all "redundancies" had been adopted in Mardi by the philosopher Babbalanja, who cried: "I will diminish; I will train myself down to the standard of what is unchangeably true. Day by day I drop off my redundancies." (II, 81).

²⁸ Letter to Hawthorne, March 1851, Thorpe, p. 388.

"Sinner would ye that your soul
 Bitter were and like the pool?
 Sip the Sodom waters dead;
 But never from thy heart shall haste
 The Marah--yea, the after-taste." (I, 314)

This symbolic action is the last step in preparing Mortmain for the whole vision of truth which shortly follows.

4. The End of the Quest

Bearing in mind the posture of the ideal quester, we may now turn to the last segment of the theme: the end of the quest.

In the spring of 1851, Melville wrote to Hawthorne:

And, perhaps, after all, there is no secret. We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron,-- nothing more!²⁹

Such a position condemns the seeker of truth to an eternal disappointment: the ultimate secret does not exist. This, however, does not represent a constant view on Melville's part if we may judge from the fate of his heroes. Not all the seekers must be satisfied with a triangle, a mallet and an apron as their ultimate answer.

In turning to the end of the quest in Clarel, we find multiple conclusions, none of which, however, represents sheer negation. Celio, like the Fifth Pilgrim of Mardi, is cut off by death in the very flower of his aspiration. That such terminus is meant to indicate failure is never explicitly concluded. Clarel in contemplating Celio's death, ponders:

For howso'er in words of men
 The word and will of God be feigned,
 No incompleteness heaven ordained. (I, 85)

The suggestion is that although Celio completes only the first lap of his pilgrimage, he, nevertheless, has reached that completion

²⁹ Letter to Hawthorne, March 1851. Thorpe, p. 388.

which was ordained for him.

Mortmain's quest also ends in death, but under very different circumstances. The cantos on the palm tree of Mar Saba (II, 135-141) are among the most important and artistic of the poem. It is while gazing upward toward this symbolic palm that Mortmain attains his ultimate vision. The use of a tree as the medium of illumination provides a focus for extensive symbolic meanings, for the idea of the sacred tree has a rich background.

"Tree" in the Christian liturgy refers to the cross, the "arbor una nobilis," the tree of salvation. To this general meaning is added the significance of "palm", the tree of victory, which for the Jews was the symbol of the righteous man, and for the Christian a symbol of the Resurrection.³⁰ Melville, with his knowledge and interest in pagan religions, would have been aware, as well, of the general Semitic belief that the palm tree was the Tree of Life, and of the Maori legends which explain how a tree formed the bridge to eternity.³¹ Most important, however, for the explication of Clarel, is the Buddhist concept of the Tree of Enlightenment. Here beneath the Bo-Tree sat Guatama triumphing over the god of love and death who tried to break his concentration, until at dawn he received perfect enlightenment.³²

Although Rolfe, Vine and Mortmain all lie beneath the influence of the mystic tree, it is to Mortmain alone that the final enlightenment comes. The phrases used by the Swede in his invocation are sufficient evidence of his attitude toward the palm: it is the

³⁰Judaic symbolism of the palm tree is discussed at some length in Maurice H. Farbridge, Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism (New York, 1923), pp. 139-141.

³¹For Semitic symbolism of the palm tree, see W. O. Oesterly, "Early Hebrew Festival Rituals," Myth and Ritual ed. Samuel H. Hooke (London, 1933).

³²See Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" (New York, 1951), pp. 31-33. See also Ananda Coomaraswamy, Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism (New York, 1916). Campbell suggests the analogy between the Bo-tree and the cross of Christ.

"holy tree", an "envoy", an "angel-tree", and finally, "Thou Paraclete". The imagery of his address to the palm is essentially that of a Christian paradise:

"Envoy, whose looks the pang assuage,
Disclose thy heavenly embassy.
That lily-rod which Gabriel bore
To Mary, kneeling her before,
Announcing a God, the mother she;
That budded stalk from Paradise--
Like that thou shin'st in thy device:
And sway'st thou over here toward me--" (II, 137)

(II, 137) The full impact of the mystery which unrolls before him casts him into a sort of dream in which he feels like a saint borne "heavenward from the bier". This simile resolves the ambiguities of Mortmain's quest and of its consummation. He has passed the last despair, and with total vision comes that peace which his tortured wanderings had won for him.

Neither Rolfe nor Vine shares this experience. Although they, too, address the palm and admit its strange supernatural influence, they are denied the revelation vouchsafed to Mortmain. Vine himself in his solitary musings admits his own defeat. As he looks across at Mortmain, "the brave one" (II, 126), lying beneath the direct influence of the palm, he admires him but makes no attempt to join him. Instead he agrees to "try an invocation" in order to "pass the time" (II, 127). Despite the wistful tone of his invocation, Vine, here as elsewhere, refuses to commit himself wholeheartedly to the values perceived and even while he pities himself as a "poor solitaire" (II, 126) he turns away from a possible involvement.

Rolfe also watches while the "tree in salutation waved across the chasm" (II, 140), but Rolfe fails to recognize the tree for what it is. Instead of admitting its ritualistic power, he merely uses it as a token of his own happy boyhood memories spent on a luxuriant,

pagan island:

Alighting on the cloistral sod
Where strange Hesperian orchards drag,
Walled round by cliff and cascabelle--
Arcades of Iris; and though lorn,
A truant ship-boy overworn,
Is hailed for a descended god? (II, 140)

For Rolfe, as for Derwent, the pilgrimage seems to have brought no new experience of truth. Of Vine we are told that upon his return to Jerusalem there was "new sense developed through fate's pertinence" (II, 284). What the nature of this new sense is we are not told; actually, Vine seems to be little different from the shy recluse of the poem's beginning.

Clarel, less flamboyantly, perhaps, echoes the endless quest of Taji. Unlike the other pilgrims, he does not return home but remains an exile in Jerusalem as Taji had remained alone upon his infinite sea. He has made his pilgrimage, he has passed through the desert of revelation, he has lived through deep personal tragedy with the death of Ruth, but no vision has been given to him. He has faced what he chooses to call the "under-formings of the mind", but without conclusion.

Are we to assume, then, that Clarel, like Pierre before him, is but another fool of truth? that the quest has come full circle without ever achieving its object? Although the inconclusive journey of the hero may at first glance suggest this, we must remember that to one member of the pilgrimage truth has been vouchsafed, and by that fact truth has proved herself to be possible of attainment. There is, then, a mortally tolerable truth. If Clarel fails to achieve his object, his failure must proceed either from a defect in himself or from external hindrances in the world about him. Yet even Clarel's "failure" must be qualified as a relative not an absolute failure.

Unlike Pierre, Clarel does not embrace an epistemological nihilism but is content to wait in patience for a still possible revelation. Through the dark days of Holy Week and the glories of Easter, he waits, hoping always that he will find in the symbolic rites enacted around him an answer to his doubts. Once again, as in his first day in Jerusalem, he hovers about the Sepulchre, but cannot bring himself to join in the triumphant cry of the faithful, "Christ is arisen" (II, 294). Whitsuntide finds him still waiting; Jerusalem is deserted now and the narrator comments:

But lagging after, who is he
Called early every hope to test,
And now, at close of rarer quest,
Finds so much more the heavier tree? (II, 296)

This is hardly an exultant note on which to end, but one cannot emphasize too strongly the fact that Clarel continues to wait in Jerusalem, the chosen city of God. He is by that very act placed in the catalogue of those men whom Melville had praised in his review of Hawthorne's Mosses as possessing that "lasting temper of all true candid men--a seeker, not a finder yet."³³

Clarel's patient waiting represents in itself a certain success; for failure, as Melville suggests in more than one place, lies not so much in a failure to achieve as in the forsaking of the quest. In Moby Dick, the narrator speaking of the heroic Bulkington, comments: ". . . better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety." (p. 105). A similar view is expressed in Mardi, as Taji determined to find his Villah at any cost and undaunted by the warnings of his friends (who also leave him alone), continues his quest: "So, if after all these fearful, fainting trances, the verdict be, the golden haven was not gained;--yet, in the bold quest thereof, better to sink in boundless

³³Thorpe, p. 340.

deeps, than float on vulgar shoals; and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do" (II, 277).

In these terms, it is only the Derwents who "craven crawl to land" who may be called utter failures. In this respect, Clarel achieves an assured place in the gallery of Melvillean heroes. He does not crawl to land. Even with the last canto of the poem he doggedly maintains his place in the "howling infinite," and in that perilous waste receives the epilogic benediction of the narrator (II, 298). While it is obvious that the ending of the quest theme in Clarel does not spell out an unqualified optimism, it is certainly a step upward from the dark pessimism of Pierre and The Confidence-Man. The despairing suicide of Pierre and the total blackness of the Fidele have given place to a melancholy figure who still clings to a shred of faith and hope. Clarel waits on and the meaning of his action is reinforced by the comment of the narrator who although aware of the power of despair indicates that in the end faith will triumph:

Unmoved by all the claims our times avow,
The ancient Sphinx still keeps the porch of shade
And comes Despair, whom not her calm may cow,
And coldly on that adamantyne brow
Scrawls undeterred his bitter pasquinade.
But Faith (who from the scrawl indignant turns),
With blood warm oozing from her wounded trust,
Inscribes even on her shards of broken urns
The sign o' the cross--the spirit above the dust!
(II, 297)

While Clarel's chief concern is with the two types of voluntary isolation (the voluntary isolation of the Mortmain),

SPIRITUAL ISOLATION

The world revolves upon an I; and we upon ourselves; for we are our own worlds:--all other men as strangers from outlandish climes, going clad in furs. (Mardi, II, 279).

The theme of spiritual isolation which is developed with great thoroughness in Clarel directly subserves the quest for truth. As we have already seen in Chapter I, the willingness to relinquish a known world in order to face alien realities is a primary requisite for the seeker of truth. There must be a departure from the homeland, a renunciation of old friends with their accepted mode of communication. The sincere seeker must turn aside from familiar landscapes and consciously move toward the isolation incumbent upon all pilgrims.

The theme of withdrawal which had already been indicated in Mardi and probed equivocally in Pierre is explored carefully in Clarel. A close analysis of the poem reveals that the total pattern of spiritual isolation is composed of four major segments: an involuntary isolation springing from temperament (the case of Djalea); an involuntary isolation springing from circumstances which make man, through pain or indifference and almost beyond his own will, withdraw into himself (the case of Agath); a voluntary isolation proceeding from a selfish withdrawal, frequently generated by a fear of pain (the case of Vine); a voluntary isolation proceeding from the choice to follow truth despite all cost (the case of Mortmain).

While Clarel presents an investigation of all four segments, the chief concern is with the two types of voluntary isolation. A con-

¹For an interesting discussion of the basic isolation of doors and walls, see Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, pp. 2-3.

sideration of these four basic postures, delineated above, and of the topographical symbols in which they are enclosed forms the material of this chapter.

1. Symbols of Isolation

The walls and gates of Jerusalem are the chief topographical symbols of isolation. As in his treatment of the desert, so here, Melville partially inverts the conventional meanings of his symbols. Walls are generally accepted symbols of protection and seclusion, enclosing and guarding what is good and repelling the evil which is forced to remain outside. To gain the walls ordinarily means to gain safety and to achieve a kind of success. Just as walls signify protection for a city, so doors signify it for individual houses.¹ In Clarel, however, this pattern is reversed, as we shall see below.

Melville's employment of this symbol leads to an unfortunate ambiguity in the establishment of meanings. It is important to note this before proceeding to explore the symbol itself. First of all, the symbol is not coexistent with the whole theme: the theme of isolation permeates the entire poem, while the symbol operates only in Part I, that part of the poem dealing specifically with the Jerusalem terrain. Secondly, and more importantly, the malign values identified with the decaying walls and doors can be equated with only one segment of the withdrawal pattern: a voluntary withdrawal selfishly motivated. This point, however, is never artistically clarified, and the casual reader may easily assume that all isolation receives symbolic judgement through what is actually a qualified symbol. Such confusion leads to inadequate and false interpretation. The wall symbol here operates as a malignant influence repre-

¹For an interesting discussion of the basic signification of doors and walls, see Dorothy Donnelly, *The Golden Well*, pp. 56-84.

senting not the full theme of spiritual isolation but only a withdrawal motivated by various types of selfishness. The walls of the city do not represent the conventional values of protection from external dangers, but now suggest pride, distrust, suspicion, the hidden and shameful secrets of the human heart. Thus the city of Jerusalem becomes a kind of city of the dead, a "city of dreadful night." The impression is one of silence and shadows. In the street outside Clarel's lodgings we are told that "a silence reigns which nature's hush of loneliness feigns" (I, 31). There is little life to be seen in this silent world, except for an occasional shadowy form:

No shape astir
Except at whiles a shadow falls
Athwart the way, and key in hand
Noiseless applies it, enters so
And vanishes. (I, 31)

This same sterile darkness and silence appear again at the very end of the poem, when, at night, Clarel re-enters the city following his pilgrimage:

. . . Here the city old,
Fast locked in torpor, fixed in blight,
No hum sent forth, revealed no light:
Though, facing it, cliff-hung Siloam--
Sepulchral hamlet--showed in tomb
A twinkling lamp. The valley slept-- (II, 281)

The isolation thus symbolized is a force proceeding not from the search for truth, but from a refusal to recognize and submit to truth. This isolation is a divisive factor, separating men from each other instead of implementing their basic human bond.

The general air of sterility in Clarel is reinforced to a large degree by the close, secret atmosphere created by the crumbling walls. It is these walls which first impress Clarel with that terrible loneliness with which Part I of the poem is filled. Towers, turrets, walls, blind windows--all are obstacles to communication,

and the hero having reached what he set for himself as his goal finds an isolation which it seems impossible to break through:

"And, at the last, aloft for goal,
Like the ice-bastions round the Pole,
Thy blank, blank towers, Jerusalem." (I, 4)

This image, which is here presented for the first time, is repeated with weary insistency throughout the first hundred pages of the poem.² Unfortunately the symbol is never actually explored, and whatever dubious success it achieves is accomplished by sheer reiteration. A few pages further on, the image is repeated with a certain elaboration:

Blind arches showed in walls of wane,
Sealed windows, portals masoned fast,
And terraces where nothing passed
By parapets all dumb. (I, 7)

The cause behind this sterility and decay is suggested in two places. In the first, the towers of the city are said to rise in "barren pride":

Each silent wall and lane--
The city's towers in barren pride
Which still in stifling air detain,
So irked him, with his burden fraught,
Timely the Jaffa Gate he sought, (I, 31-32)

The second suggestion is even more revealing, indicating as it does the isolation consequent upon "barren pride":

Few casements, few, and latticed deep,
High raised above the head below,
That none might listen, pry, or peep,
Or any hint or inkling know
Of that strange innocence or sin
Which locked itself so close within. (I, 31)³

² See also *Clarel*, I, 7, 8, 65-66, 88-89, 100, 101, 184. The effective isolation imagery in the sketch of Hunilla in the *Encantadas* finds an echo in *Clarel* in Agath's canto, "The Island." For the development of this Isolation theme as it appears in Melville's shorter novels, see William Runden, *Imagery in Melville's Shorter Fiction* (University of Indiana, dissertation on microfilm, 1952), pp. 142-145

³ Italics mine.

All of this imagery bears sufficient witness that the significance of the wall symbol is of a malign withdrawal which seeks to cover its own strange secrets, and shuns the openness requisite for human companionship; such a withdrawal has no kinship with that "inward turning" and voluntary spiritual isolation which has for its only motivation the quest for truth.

2. The Basic Premise for Isolation

Before proceeding to an investigation of the four types of withdrawal, it is necessary to indicate what was for Melville a basic premise underlying the whole theme of isolation. This is the concept that all men are, by their nature, isolated from each other to some degree. The earliest statement of this assumption occurs in Mardi. Toward the end of the voyage, the philosopher Babbalanja comments:

"The world revolves upon an I; and we upon ourselves; for we are our own worlds:--all other men as strangers from outlandish distant climes, going clad in furs." (II, 279)

This is the early Melville's symbolic statement of that essential isolation upon which all communication must be built and which indicates why human fellowship must remain always imperfect.

This assumption, accepted casually in Mardi, is repeated with increasing bitterness in Moby Dick and Pierre, and reaches a peak of irony in The Confidence-Man. The seeds of Babbalanja's mild statement, "we are our own worlds," comes to full flowering in the sardonic introduction of The Practical Disciple to the Mystic:

"Egbert, this. . . is, like all of us, a stranger. I wish you, Egbert, to know this brother stranger, be communicative with

him" (p. 222).⁴ The paradoxical title of "brother stranger" indicates the mistrust which the older Melville greeted all theories of brotherhood. The author of The Confidence-Man found communication only a fraudulent deception by which language had been perverted for the dissemination of lies.

In Clarel, however, the irony and pessimism of The Confidence-Man is replaced by a philosophic objectivity; nor, indeed, is Melville explicitly concerned with the problem of fundamental human isolation. As in the quest for truth (Ch. I, sec. 1), we saw that he passed from his earlier preoccupation with the essentially inscrutable nature of truth to truth as imperfectly perceived because of a defective intellect, so here in the theme of spiritual isolation he proceeds from a consideration of an inevitable isolation to an exploration of the various types of withdrawal produced by the temperament, the environment, the deliberate actions of individual characters.

⁴Later, Babbalanja in exploring the problem of isolation, concludes that, over and above this essential and involuntary isolation of all men, there is a deliberate withdrawal which proceeds from pride, undue reserve, or a fear of ridicule which keeps one from openly expressing what may be a legitimate affection (II, 279).

With Moby Dick, the sense of man's innate aloneness is increased. The secrets which man hides beneath a simple exterior are profound, and no amount of human knowledge can force a revelation. Not even "Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages," could read "the simplest peasant's face in its profounder and more subtle meanings" (p. 345). The simple savage Queequeg became a symbol of the mystery which man is, not only to his fellow men, but even to himself: ". . . Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last" (p. 477).

In Pierre, the hero was doomed to a loneliness which human love could not alleviate: "On either hand clung to by a girl who would have laid down her life for him; Pierre, nevertheless, in his deepest, highest part was utterly without sympathy from anything divine, human, brute, or vegetable. One in a city of thousands of human beings, Pierre was solitary as at the Pole" (p. 398).

Bearing in mind these basic considerations, we may explore the four types of withdrawal indicated at the beginning of this chapter:

3. Involuntary Isolation: Temperament

Djalea, a "Druze of Lebanon" and "an Emir's son" (I, 197), who guides the pilgrimage through the Holy Land, operates as the purest type of isolation consequent upon natural temperament. He has a certain self-sufficiency and independence of persons and circumstances which enable him to rest peacefully in his aloofness. This is seen in the initial description of him provided by the narrator:

Exiled, cut off, in friendless state,
The Druze maintained an air sedate;
Without the sacrifice of pride,
Sagacious still he earned his bread,
E'en managed to maintain the head,
Yes, lead men still, if but as guide
To pilgrims. (I, 197)

Djalea's reserve is the poise of a man who has found answers and rests in them. He does not suffer from Vine's painful sensitivity nor from Agath's inarticulateness. Far from being ill at ease when questioned by the inquisitive Rolfe, he immediately indicates himself as master of the situation:

To courteous challenge sent,
The Druze responded, not by word
Indeed, but act; he came; content
He leaned beside them in accord,
Resting the pipe-bowl. His assent
In joining them, nay, all his air
Mute testimony seemed to bear
That now night's siren element,
Stealing upon his inner frame,
Pliant had made it and more tame. (II, 76-77)

During the night revel at Mar Saba, Djalea, having completed his duties, slips aside and is later found by Rolfe and Clarel lying tranquilly on the ledge overlooking the abyss upon which the monastery is built. To their questions concerning the mysteries of his religion he has but a single answer:

wicket," he is "No God there is but God," he said,
 And tapped the ashes from the bowl,
 his heart is full And stood. 'Twas passive self-control
 to this tendency Of Pallas statue in sacked Rome
 sent, Vine impo Which bode till pushed from off the plinth;
 fuller explorat Betook him where cool sleep might come;
 "Allah preserve ye, Allah great!" (II, 77)

Thus he ends by his "passive self control" all religious inquiries and retires to his own inner security.

Since the Druze, however, functions as only a minor character, our investigation of the first type of withdrawal must include the complex character of Vine who represents both a natural isolation consequent upon temperament and a voluntary isolation generated by selfishness.

Vine's nature is one which instinctively turns to withdrawal in the face of difficulties. The images which describe him are those of reserve and elusiveness. He is aware of this quality of his temperament and ponders, "how share the gushing amity with all?" (II, 126)--a query which he is never able to answer satisfactorily.

The first appearance of Vine indicates his innate reserve:

But who is he uncovered seen
 No himself tell Profound in shadow of the tomb
 a sailing vessel Reclined, with meditative mien
 escaped (II, 60) Intent upon the tracery?
 we learn of Agatha A low wind waves his Lydian hair:
 snatched his eye A funeral man, yet richly fair--
 (II, 130). Fair as the sabled violets be.

The frieze and this secluded one
 retaining each a separate tone,
 Beauty yet harmonised in grace
 But nothing that he was discerned,
 (II, 130). Salute the stranger made, then turned
 His narrat And shy passed forth in obvious state
 Of one who would keep separate. (I, 111)

The qualities suggested in this initial description are underscored by repetition and elaboration throughout Part I. His speech betrays disuse, his "virgin soul communed with men but thro the

wicket," he is pure and virginal as a "white swan in the April hours," his heart is full of rich shadows like a garden at evening.⁵ Added to this tendency to isolation consequent upon his natural temperament, Vine imposes a further voluntary isolation. For this reason a fuller exploration of this character is reserved for section five of this chapter, that section dealing with voluntary withdrawal selfishly motivated.

4. Involuntary Isolation: Circumstance

Although to some degree Agath belongs to the group of men whom nature had endowed with a singular reserve, he is more properly representative of that second type of involuntary isolation consequent upon circumstances.

Agath, the old Greek sailor, who is first discovered by Rolfe standing solitary during the midnight revel at Mar Saba, is a man shaped by misfortune:

Such he, who in high nook disturbed
Upon his mat by late uncurbed
Light revel, came with air subdued,
And by the clustered arms here stood
Regarding them with dullish eye
Of some old reminiscence sad. (II, 59)

He himself tells the story of the weird wreck of The Peace of God, a sailing vessel bound for Venice--a wreck from which he alone escaped (II, 60-61). Later, through the narration of the Lesbian, we learn of Agath's encounter with a strange bird of prey which had snatched his cap from his head and in some manner affected his mind (II, 130).

His narration concerning the desolate island on which he had lived for some time in his youth underscores the theme of hardship which runs throughout his life. He explains that this desert island

⁵Clarel, I, 116, 285-286, 261. See also I, 114, 129, 131.

is to be found "in waters where no charts avail" (II, 169). In the description which follows, we learn that it is a pathless island of rocks, sterility, and volcanic peaks. Cactus and a giant tortoise alone inhabit this desolate land (II, 169-172).

Even Agath's existence at Mar Saba is explained in terms of misfortune. One day as he wandered alone in the vicinity he was robbed and beaten by wild tribesmen and left to perish outside the monastery walls (II, 62-63). These are the trials which have endued Agath with a stoic strength of character, an inarticulate fortitude, which finds its own strength in silence and reserve.⁶

Ungar, the American ex-patriot, shares with Agath this stoic reserve tempered by the blows of misfortune. Although his isolation bears a surface resemblance to the voluntary isolation of Mortmain, it differs in one important aspect, that of motivation. Mortmain is the purest example of a voluntary withdrawal in pursuit of truth, and in this Ungar does not share. His reserve does not proceed from a positive motive, but is rather passively accepted as the only possible response left before the encroachments of an invincible fate. Unlike Agath, however, this professional soldier is far from inarticulate. With him, bitter and turbulent words gush forth until the placid Derwent is frightened by his violence; yet even during these outbursts, one is aware of secrets not revealed, of mysterious depths not probed:

. . . . Of him you'd say--

A veteran, no more. But nay:

Brown eyes, what reveries they keep-

Sad woods they be, where wild things sleep (II, 157)

As Agath recites the story of his desert island, Rolfe and Vine secretly watch Ungar, "the officer with forest eyes" (II, 175).

⁶See also Chapter V, section 4 which discusses Agath's attitude to suffering.

Realizing that they will never learn his story from his own lips, they ask the Druze for some account of his background. But Djalea beyond indicating that he is now a mercenary soldier for any country that will pay him, keeps Ungar's secrets:

No more? No more the Druze let fall,
If more he knew. (II, 176)

It is finally through the narrator that we learn that Ungar's isolation stems from his half-breed blood (he is an Anglo-Indian) and from his dissenting convictions concerning the civil war. It is the latter which is the proximate cause of his exile:

Now was he the self-exiled one.
Too steadfast! Wherefore should be lent
The profitless high sentiment?
Renounce conviction in defeat:
Pass over, share the spoiler's seat
And thrive. Behooves thee else turn cheek
To fate with wisdom of the meek.
Wilt not? Unblest them with the store
Of heaven, and spurning worldly lore
Astute, eat thou thy cake of pride,
And henceforth live on unallied.--(II, 179)

Thus, Ungar is forced by circumstances into a position of isolation which is not in accord with his natural desires. As he parts from the pilgrimage at Bethlehem, we catch hints of deep reserves of feeling behind his external stoicism:

Brief the word:
No hand he grasped; yet was he stirred,
Despite his will, in heart at core:
'Twas countrymen he here forsook:
He felt it; and his aspect wore,
In the last parting, that strange look
Of one enlisted for sad fight
Upon some desperate dark shore. (II, 272)

The passage quoted above is the last reference given to this exiled soldier who, embittered by the senseless brutality and injustice of war, is forced into the solitude of a dark reserve.

Whether Nehemiah can be classified rightly with this group whose isolation stems largely from the force of circumstance, it is not

easy to say. His case is a complex one, suggesting a transition between an involuntary isolation consequent upon temperament, circumstances, and vocation, and a voluntary isolation which deliberately chooses, for various motives, to withdraw from the society of men.

Concerning his background, Nehemiah is singularly silent for one who is almost garrulous in discussing his prophetic mission. Although Clarel is closer to the old man than any of the other pilgrims, nevertheless even Clarel's sympathetic curiosity goes unrewarded when he attempts to learn anything of Nehemiah's former life:

His waning energies seemed massed
Here, and but here, to keep the door.
At present his reserve of brow
Reproach in such sort did avow
That Clarel never pressed him more. (I, 151)

This character of withdrawal is further implemented by the images of solitude used to describe his dwelling which is located in the most desolate area of the crumbling city:

As a proph It (his chamber) looked out through low window small
On other courts of bale shut in,
Whose languishment of crumbling wall
Breathed that despair alleged of sin. (I, 90)

And later, this loneliness is underscored by the analogical description of a lone sparrow, the only sign of life near this bleak abode:

But this single one
Plaining upon a terrace high,
Was like the Psalmist making moan
For loss of mate--forsaken quite. (I, 150)

Although at one point it is hinted that his isolation is consequent upon a disillusionment with mankind, the most persistently

Melville's use of Biblical characters, see Nathaniel Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible, pp. 21ff. See also Melville's Journal, pp. 142-143, n. 8.

delineated cause of withdrawal stems from his prophetic mission.⁷

He had first come to Jerusalem years before not as a member of a chartered mission group, but "single in person as in plan" (I, 35). His spirit of poverty and dedication to his cause makes him respected as a saint by both Arab and Christian:

Latin, Armenian, Greek, and Jew
Full well the harmless vagrant kenned,
The small meek face, the habit gray:
In him they owned our human clay.
The Turk went further: let him wend;
Him Allah cares for, holy one:
A Santon held him; and was none
Bigot enough scorn's shaft to send. (I, 36)

Yet this very reputation for holiness places him apart. In Nehemiah we have a dramatization of a point which Melville had made many years earlier in Moby Dick in connection with black Pip's madness: "He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic . . ." (p. 413)

As a prophet, Nehemiah's attempts at communication and in failure, for Christian, Arab, and Jew alike show but little interest in the Biblical tracts which the Evangelist attempts, often imprudently,

⁷The hint of Nehemiah's disillusionment is provided by a tale which the Evangelist had once told Clarel, and which the latter recalls after the old man's death. It was the story of a carpenter who was deeply hurt by his dearest friend and who, as a consequence, abjured the company of mankind and turned wholly to divine things (II, 9-11).

Actually, his prophetic mission is more important as a motive for his isolation. The name of Nehemiah is taken from the prophetic book by that name in the Old Testament. To the prophet Nehemiah had been given the task of restoring the walls of Jerusalem, a task which he acquitted with courage and prudence. Melville's Nehemiah has little in common with the Biblical figure aside from his basic mission to rebuild the walls of the Holy City. For a discussion of Melville's use of Biblical characters, see Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible, pp. 21ff. See also Melville's Journal, pp. 142-143, n. 8.

to proffer.⁸

5. Voluntary Isolation: Selfishness

With the case of Nehemiah we pass from the province of indeliberate isolation to that which is, with divers motivations, deliberately willed. In entering into this segment of the theme we are at the heart of the argument, for in sections five and six we are concerned with isolation as it deliberately serves the major theme, the quest for truth. In section five we are faced with the tragedy of the man who perverts withdrawal for his own ends. It is Vine who represents this section.

Vine's natural reserve of temperament (discussed in section three of this chapter) is augmented by a deliberate withdrawal, the value of which is sometimes ambivalently presented. In Mardi the commentary of the philosopher Babbalanja on such reserve had been an unequivocal condemnation:

"... the man who, in the presence of his very friends, parades a barred and bolted front,--that man so highly prizes his sweet self, that he cares not to profane the shrine he worships, by throwing open its portals. He is looked up and Ego is the key. Reserve alone is vanity." (II, 279)

The elder Melville, however, softens his judgement, for in him the intolerant optimism of youth had been tempered by doubt and skepticism. In the years intervening between the composition of Mardi and Clarel Melville and Hawthorne had enjoyed their period of full friendship, and through Hawthorne Melville learned of a reserve consequent upon a shy and sensitive heart. It is this first-hand knowledge of shy withdrawal which permits Melville to shape Vine with a gentle hand. Although it is a gentle hand, it is not a condoning one, for what emerges from the full portrait of Vine is the picture

⁸See these episodes of rejection: I, 67, 112, 267.

of a man gifted with "choicer treasure, rarer store" (I, 129) to which he refuses the key.

Vine's isolation finds its fullest and most dramatic expression in the Vine-Clarel relationship. Clarel's attraction for Vine is, ironically, largely based upon Vine's native reserve. This the young hero finds far more attractive than the frank openness of Rolfe.¹⁰ As Clarel sits alone in the desert watching the night sky, he ponders:

How frank seemed Rolfe. Yet Vine could lure
Despite reserve which overture
Withstood--e'en Clarel's--late repealed,
Finding that heart a fountain sealed. (I, 238)

Clarel is fascinated by thoughts of "choicer treasure" (I, 129) which remains locked to the casual acquaintance but which he hopes may be revealed to the true friend. To him, this "Ariel unknown" appears "the richer for the shade about him" (I, 116).

Clarel first notes Vine's aloofness when he meets him at the Sepulchre of Kings, but it is not until later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, that the young American becomes aware that such deliberate aloofness may establish a permanent obstacle to the friendship which he so much desires:

For Vine, aloof he loitered--shrunk
In privacy and shunned the monk.
Clarel awaited him. He came--
The shadow of his previous air
Merged in a settled neutral frame--
Assumed, may be. Would Vine disclaim
All sympathy the youth might share? (I, 119)

Vine's physical aloofness is repeated frequently throughout the poem: in the desert, Vine sits plaiting the branches of a thorn bush; at the Dead Sea, he lies motionless upon a rock with his eyes bent upon the waves and with a half-fossilized branchless tree at his feet; at Mar Saba in the dusk of evening he "reclines aloof"

upon a ledge overlooking the abyss, and later finds a solitary resting place on the stairs which lead to the mystic palm.⁹

All of these images of physical isolation find their full symbolic meaning toward the end of Part II, in the canto, "Vine and Clarel". Here, Clarel openly reveals his overpowering desire for human love, and, at the moment of his fullest hope, is repulsed by Vine.¹⁰ This scene follows the encounter of the pilgrims with the Dominican friar. This episode with its arguments and counter-arguments left Clarel baffled and distressed. His admiration for Rolfe's intellectual integrity was undermined by the older man's apparent vacillation. As he ponders upon this "capricious man" he is forced to acknowledge that he "cannot penetrate him" (I, 284).

Perplexed and troubled, he turned to Vine for sympathy and security. Clarel perceives in Vine his gift of intuitive truth and reaches out to share it. He senses that such truth must be experienced rather than learned, and, consequently, he turns to Vine not merely for discursive assurance but for an experience of love through which he will be enabled to share Vine's vision.

Here Vine is described in images of virginity--symbolic indication that his dearest secret will remain uncommunicated:

⁹Clarel, I, 245, 309; II, 126, 146

¹⁰Professor Baird in discussing the theme of friendship in Melville's works suggests that it finds its source in the Polynesian ideal of tayo. This relationship, similar to that denoted by matrimony in the Christian world, is essentially oriental in tone. It is tayo which is at the base of Melville's own passionate friendship for Hawthorne as well as of the various "pairs" of friends which appear in all of the novels.

In Clarel, Baird points to Rolfe and Clarel as the main illustration of such friendship; Vine is not mentioned. Although such an illustration is correct, surely the main evidence of tayo in Clarel is the proffer of Clarel's friendship to Vine. (James Baird, Ishmael [Baltimore, 1956], pp. 205-220).

So pure, so virginal in shrine
Of true unworldliness looked Vine. (I, 286)

Clarel, lost to every thought but his need for "communion true," is forgetful of "prior advances unreturned" (I, 286) and continues to hope that Vine will respond to his need for union of soul. Interi-
only he cries:

Ah, call me brother!--
So feminine his passionate mood
Which, long as hungering unfed,
All else rejected or withstood. (I, 287)

But Vine, once he becomes aware of the implications of Clarel's overture, withdraws as before:

Here over Vine there slid a change--
A shadow, such as thin may show
Gliding along the mountain-range
And deepening in the gorge below. (I, 287)

Vine's posture is more than an immature self-consciousness in the presence of excessive sentiment--although this may be an element of his response. Actually, his posture is that of a deliberate and mature rejection, the possible motivation for which is suggested a few lines further on:

Does Vine's rebukeful dusking say--
Why, on this vernal bank to-day
Why bring oblations of thy pain
To one who hath his share? here fain
Would lap him in a chance reprieve?
Lives none can help ye; that believe.
Art thou the first soul tried by doubt?
Shalt prove the last? Go, live it out. (I, 287)

These lines suggest valuable clues for an understanding of the type of spiritual isolation typified by Vine, underscoring as they do that the motive behind his action is the evasion of suffering. Earlier in the poem such motivation was suggested in a canto which designated Vine as a "recluse":

Like to the nunnery's denizen
 His virgin soul communed with men
 But thro' the wicket. Was it clear
 This coyness bordered not on fear--
 Fear or an apprehensive sense?
 Not wholly seemed it diffidence
 Recluse. (I, 116)

Thus, Vine's withdrawal is basically negative, proceeding from a desire to find a refuge from pain, a "chance reprieve" from suffering.¹¹

Vine's inability to endure spiritual suffering is emphasized in the canto, "Bell and Cairn" (II, 33), in which Clarel chances upon him hidden away among the crags near Mar Saba, a victim of his own supersensitivity. Quivering with "weak swell'n lips" he is likened to David concealed in Adullam's lair. At last Clarel sees his "reserves laid bare," but in that very sight realizes that Vine's mystery lies far beyond his ken:

Grateful that he was unespied,
 Clarel quite noiseless slipped aside:
 Ill hour (thought he), an evil sign:
 No more need dream of winning Vine
 Or coming at his mystery. (II, 34)

Clarel's ultimate estrangement from Vine is inextricably bound with the latter's supersensitive reaction to suffering. Vine does not turn away from the world of commonplace in order to free himself for the ultimate vision of truth, but rather uses physical isolation as a barrier to that full vision of truth which of its very nature encompasses mortal suffering. Perhaps in this attitude of soul lies the reason why Vine, despite his rich gifts of nature, is denied the revelation vouchsafed to Nehemiah at the

¹¹Professor G. Giovannini in reading this manuscript suggested that the clause quoted in the text, "here fair/Would lap him in a chance reprieve," might refer to Clarel rather than to Vine. The structure of the sentence leaves the antecedent ambiguous; in either case, however, the basic attitude of Vine remains unchanged.

banks of the Dead Sea and to Mortmain beneath the palm of Mar Saba.¹²

6. Voluntary Isolation: the Quest for Truth

The motivation of Mortmain's isolation is unequivocally presented: he is representative of a voluntary withdrawal deliberately chosen in the pursuit of truth.

From the beginning of the pilgrimage he is set apart by his funereal attitude, his skull-cap, his preoccupied mien (I, 179). Throughout Mortmain's life his isolation becomes progressively more profound. His position as an illegitimate son had early estranged him from his family:

His father, while not owning, yet
In part discharged the natural debt
Of duty; gave him liberal lore
And timely income; but no more.
Thus isolated, what to bind
But the vague bond of human kind? (I, 187)

While still young he left his own country (Sweden) for Paris, hoping that in that city of "evil and good" (I, 188) he would be able to fulfill his political idealism as a member of a revolutionary party.

But in this, too, he met disillusionment in the falsity of his fellow workers. He saw the false Judases who were all too ready to "clasp pledged hands and take the oath" (I, 188) without really dedicating themselves to the cause. Again he withdraws, leaving behind the hopes and ideals on which he had centered his life.

In this frame of mind he repudiates all former ties and joins the pilgrimage. But even the isolation provided by the pilgrimage is not sufficient for him, and, goaded by a bitter passion, he

¹²In choosing Vine's name, it is possible that beside the more obvious scriptural passages, Melville may also have had in mind the line of the prophet Osee: "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit until himself" (Osee, X, 1).

wrests himself from this last bond of human sympathy to spend a lonely night on the desert.¹³

Mortmain's attitude is akin to that of the Syrian monk whom the pilgrims meet near the Quarantania:

A strange wayfarer of the night
Who, 'twixt the small hour and the gray,
With cruse and scrip replenished late
In Jericho at the wattled gate,
Had started on the upland way:
A young strange man of aspect thin
From vigils which in fast begin. (I, 240)

He also had gone into the desert for a solitary vigil of forty days in which he wrestled with the problem of doubt which was besieging him. Monk though he was, he needed the further isolation of complete solitude to fight the temptations with which he was shaken:

He told how that for forty days,
Not yet elapsed, he dwelt in ways
Of yonder Quarantanian height,
A true recluse, an anchorite;
And only came at whiles below,
And ever in the calm of night,
To beg for scraps in Jericho.
'Twas sin, he said, that drove him out
Into the desert--sin of doubt. (I, 241)

Like Mortmain, the Syrian feels no fear of the physical isolation imposed by the desert if only he can ascertain the spiritual reality of God's existence. The motivation which impels both of these characters is, therefore, a positive spiritual good. It is this which clearly distinguishes Mortmain from Vine, whose deliberate motivation is essentially negative--the evasion of suffering. Contrarily, Mortmain's withdrawal serves only to immerse him in deeper pain since it removes all physical distraction and leaves him free for his own bitter, consuming thoughts.

The images describing Mortmain are generally suggestive of

¹³This position will be explored more fully later in this chapter when discussing Clarel and the problem of isolation (section 7).

isolation, and this becomes increasingly clear after his lonely vigil. Upon his reappearance from the desert, even the friendly pilgrims fall back before what they see:

Like Hecla ice inveined with marl
And frozen cinders shows his face
Rigid and darkened. Shunning parole
He seated him aloof in place,
Hands clasped about the knees drawn up
As round the cask the binding hoop--
Condensed in self, or like a seer
Unconscious of each object near. (I, 313)

Sitting alone, withdrawn into himself, he is compared to a grey osprey gazing into the waves (I, 320). Later, as he sits aloof at the banquet of Mar Saba, he is said to look like a statue, so dead his profile seems (II, 56).

Mortmain's final act of estrangement is the drinking of the water of the Dead Sea, despite the ominous song of the Bethlehemite guide which prophesies that he who drinks shall forever taste in his heart the bitterness of those waters (I, 314). Mortmain alone of all the pilgrims experiences the terrible bitterness of those waters which so well accords with his own frustration of soul. All of these acts of voluntary isolation, however, bear the fruit of revelation when he finally lies tranquilly beneath the palm of Mar Saba; there we are explicitly told that Mortmain's deliberate asceticism has prepared him for the final vision:

Indeed, each wakeful night, and fast
(That feeds and keeps what clay would clutch)
With thrills which he did still outlast,
His fibres made so fine in end
That though in trials fate can lend
Firm to withstand, strong to contend;
Sensitive he to a spirit's touch. (II, 137)

7. The Position of the Hero

Clarel himself has not been included in any of the preceding categories because within the framework of the pilgrimage he is not

confined to any single class, but passes from one to another in his role of maturing hero. During the course of the poem, Clarel passes from the selfishness of a negative isolationist to the mature withdrawal of the heroic man.

In the beginning of the poem Clarel had, by his inward turning (I, 4), expressed his desire for voluntary exile; but this desire for isolation must undergo certain purifications before the hero can reach the full stature of the seeker for truth. Clarel's fearful withdrawal from Celio, his excessive desire for Vine's love, his ambivalence of attitude toward Nehemiah--all of these are flaws from which he must be freed if he is to achieve that detachment of soul necessary for the full pursuit of truth.¹⁴ And as the props of human companionship are removed one by one (the deaths of Celio and Nehemiah and his loss of faith in Rolfe and Vine), a process culminating in the death of Agar and Ruth, Clarel does attain that necessary poise of soul as we shall see below.

In Part I, Clarel is delineated as a young man endowed with a temperament both shy and reserved. These qualities are augmented by his vocation and education: he is a student of theology, more used to books than men:

'Twas a mind,
Earnest by nature, long confined
Apart like Vesta in a grove
Collegiate. . . . (I, 6)

In this first section of the poem, Clarel is provided with an opportunity for a deep, satisfying friendship with the young Italian pilgrim, Celio. Clarel, however, in a manner which foreshadows Vine's later conduct toward him, rejects the proffered love and withdraws into his own tightly closed world.

In the theme of spiritual isolation, Celio often functions as

¹⁴Clarel, I, 44-45, 62, 84, 284-288.

a foil for Clarel. He is first introduced as the "unknown", and this, for Clarel, he remains despite the many opportunities presented to the latter to break through the barriers of isolation and establish a spiritual communication. Celio himself follows a pattern of withdrawal, but his is the selfless withdrawal of the truth seeker.¹⁵ More enlightened than Clarel, the Italian realizes that within the frame of necessary isolation it is possible to find other human beings who, sharing his own aspirations, may help him on his way. This idea is implemented by an image which occurs following the first meeting of Celio and Clarel:

Blue-lights sent up by ship forlorn
Are answered oft but by the glare
Of rockets from another, torn
In the same gale's inclusive snare. (I, 51)

In Clarel, Celio perceives a "brother that he well might own in tie of spirit" (I, 44). His own reserve hinders him from speaking, but in the moments of silence which follow their initial meeting it is clear that the failure to respond must be imputed to Clarel:

Ere Clarel, here embarrassed grown,
Made recognition, the Unknown
Compressed his lips, turned, and was gone.

.....
The student in his heart confessed
A novel sympathy impressed;
And late remissness to retrieve
Fain the encounter would renew
And yet--if oft one's resolution
Be overruled by constitution--
Herein his heart he might deceive. (I, 44-45)

Yet, although the opportunity to "retrieve" his mistake is given him several times, Clarel fails on each occasion. Not long after his first blunder, the two meet at the Gate of St. Stephen, but once again Clarel fails to meet the proffered friendship:

But inexperienced, shy, unsure--
Again did Clarel hesitate;
When quick the proud one with a look

¹⁵See Chapter I, section 3.

Which might recoil of heart betray,
 And which the other scarce might brook
 In recollection, turned away. (I, 62)

Following Clarel's rejection, Celio, like a wounded animal, turns to a deeper solitude within the city. There, within the heart of the desolated Jerusalem, alone and with his face turned toward the wall, a symbol of isolation, he dies (I, 84). Celio, "alone in outer dark" (I, 55), is symbolic of the enduring isolation of the heroic man and is a prefiguration of that isolation which Clarel himself will later face. Celio, considered in this role, takes his place with those other Melvillean characters who, although feeling the attraction of human friendship, forge ahead into a world of isolation. Thus Celio is united to Bulkington who remained in the bosom of his family for only a few days and then resolutely turned to the sea again; to Ahab who would not yield to the inducements of human affection presented by Starbuck but sailed straight on; to Pierre whose whole story was but a crescendo of withdrawal; and to Mortmain whose impassioned quest drove him to his solitary vigil in the heart of the desert.¹⁶

¹⁶Of Bulkington, taken here as a symbol of heroic isolation, Melville had written: "Let me only say that it fared with him as with the storm-tossed ship, that miserably drives along the leeward land. The port would fain give succor; the port is pitiful; in the port is safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that's kind to our mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is the ship's direst jeopardy; she must fly all hospitality. . . all deep earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea. . . ." (p.105).

For the episode of Starbuck and Ahab, see *Moby Dick*, Ch. cxxxii. Pierre's "crescendo of withdrawal" can be indicated as follows: first he withdraws from the known, pleasant values of Saddle Meadows to the cold, cobblestoned city; then he proceeds from the "known" part of the city (his cousin's residence) to the "unknown" part (the residence of the Apostles); even here, however, he is not content, and at night he wanders alone into the least frequented parts of the city. The climax is reached when the narrator comments: "By-and-by on such howling, pelting nights, he began to bend his steps down the dark, narrow, side-streets, in quest of the more secluded and mysterious tap-rooms. . . . But at last he began to feel a distaste for even these; and now nothing but the utter night—desolation of the obscurest warehousing lanes would content him, or be sufferable to him" (p. 401).

The rejection of Celio by Clarel has its counterpart in Clarel's rejection by Vine. The juxtaposition of these two episodes suggest dramatically the maturation of the young hero. The Clarel of Part III is no longer the selfish inflicter of suffering but the man who now must bear the blows inflicted by others. In a canto previously quoted, Vine's meagre solace to the sorely tried student is:

Art thou the first soul tried by doubt?
Shalt prove the last? Go, live it out. (I, 287)

This is grim comfort, but it is the advice which Clarel ultimately pursues. His long journey has taught him that human sympathy is not easily come by, nor is it necessary for the questing hero. In the last analysis, every man must work out his own life, surrounded by other men and occasionally helped by them, but essentially alone.

At the conclusion of Part IV, Clarel remains alone in Jerusalem while the other pilgrims journey homewards. The image presented in Part I (I, 81) of Clarel standing alone like a ship-boy, unaccompanied, in his watch at the mast-head, has its fulfillment in a passage at the end of the poem when he remains solitary in Jerusalem:

Day passed; and passed a second one,
A third--fourth--fifth; and bound he sate
In film of sorrow without moan--
Abandoned, in the stony strait
Of mutineer thrust on wild shore,
Hearing, beyond the roller's froth,
The last dip of the parting oar. (II, 288)

He is a lonely figure, but not a hopeless one. His last pose suggests that if truth is to be found it will be found beyond human companionship, beyond human solace, in a detachment which knows how to sit solitary, awaiting revelation.

This seems to be Melville's final word on this theme of spiritual isolation. In Clarel we are presented with a balanced synthesis

which sees some isolation as essential to the nature of man, and which recognizes a further voluntary isolation which, however, is beneficent only when impelled toward a positive end. A philosophy of negative isolation, however closely Melville may have veered toward it in his other works, is clearly repudiated in Clarel.

THE HEAD AND THE HEART

Thinking is, or ought to be a coolness and a calmness; and our poor hearts throb, and our poor brains beat too much for that.

(Moby Dick, p. 555)

Whether we consider Clarel as an expression of the maturation of the heroic man, as does Walter Bezanson, or whether we consider it under the formality of the quest pattern, the theme of head and heart is of equal importance.¹ The relationship between this theme and the acquisition of truth in some degree modified and explicates the nature of the truth sought. Chapter I has already suggested that the object of the quest is a full vision which is neither the product of a wholly discursive reasoning nor a totally intuitive perception (Chapter I, section 1). This chapter in its investigation of the meanings Melville places on the terms "head" and "heart" provides a further commentary on the type of truth which Clarel seeks.

We shall learn by carefully examining this theme that discursive reasoning may be equated with the head, source of logical judgements, and that intuitive perception may be defined in terms of the heart, the organ of love. The truth which the ideal quester seeks is a balanced truth, at once speculative and intuitive, which demands the cooperation of both head and heart. The theory, prevalent throughout Melville's works, that pain provides one of the

¹Walter Bezanson suggests as the basic theme of Clarel the development of the young man as a hero. Nathalia Wright generalizes further to include all the works from Typee to Pilly Budd in this basic narrative pattern of the "maturation of a young man." Mardi, she feels, indicates the development of the head alone, Pierre of the heart alone, while Moby Dick bears witness to the development of both head and heart. "Form and Function in Melville", PMLA, LXVII (1952), 330-340. While one may take exception to this over-simplified dichotomy, the point of the importance of this theme for an understanding of Melville's maturing hero is well made.

widest avenues to truth receives further emphasis here through the indication that the maturation of the heart is accomplished largely in terms of personal suffering. Finally, the full vision is described as a personal revelation prepared for by a unique, highly individual, and essentially incommunicable experience, an experience which will be largely, although not exclusively, in terms of the heart.

This theme will be explored by a consideration of the following points: the meaning of the terms, the protagonists of both heart and head, the full-developed man, and the problem of the hero.

1. The Meaning of the Terms

An awareness of Melville's preoccupation with the words, "head" and "heart", will indicate that the terms as they appear in Clarel are not randomly chosen but represent a deep-seated problem which appears not only in his works but in his personal letters as well.

The first appearance of the term "heart" in Clarel occurs in the canto, "The Sepulchre" (I, 14-20). The narrator begins by describing the various reactions manifested by the tourists who visit the spot where the body of Christ had been laid: childlike faith, skepticism, scorn. Then, with an unprepared for and inexplicable change of address, the narrator turns and addresses the following lines, presumably, to the reader:

Thou,
Less sensitive, yet haply versed
In everything above, below--
In all but thy deep human heart;
Thyself perchance mayst nervous start
At thine own fancy's final range
Who here wouldst mock: (I, 18)

Here, for the first time within the poem, a dichotomy is set up between the head and the heart. It is suggested that the addressee,

despite his wide range of knowledge ("versed in everything above, below") has never explored the regions of the heart through which the mysteries of faith must be approached. He who approaches only through the head will "mock" not worship. This passage, taken in the context of the whole canto, indicates the inadequacy of that purely discursive knowledge which disregards the intuitive wisdom provided by the human heart.

A glance at Melville's letters to Hawthorne and to Evert Duyckinck will clarify the meaning of the dichotomy which is assumed in Clarel.

In a letter written in June, 1851, occur the famous lines which ally Melville with the protagonists of the heart: "I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head! I had rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head."² An evaluation of this avowal, however, demands an understanding of Melville's use of his terms. Two years previously, in commenting on Emerson, he had written to Duyckinck: "His belly, sir, is in his chest, & his brains descend down into his neck & offer an obstacle to a draught of ale or a mouthful of cake."³ In this case, Melville suggests that extensive brains militate against that genial and hearty living of which he was in favor.

This same attitude is repeated in another letter to Duyckinck, this time in relation to Hawthorne's Twice Told Tales. "Some of these sketches are wonderfully subtle," Melville wrote. "Their deeper meanings are worthy of a Brahmin. Still there is something lacking--a good deal lacking--to the plump sphericity of the man.

²Letter to Hawthorne, June 1851. Thorpe, p. 392.

³Letter to Evert Duyckinck, March 1849. Thorpe, p. 372.

What is that?--He doesn't patronize the butcher--he needs roast-beef done rare."⁴

The capacity for cakes and ale, however, is but one aspect of the well-developed heart; balancing this aptness for geniality is the ability to penetrate the dark places of human nature. In Pierre, Melville had employed his favorite image of descent to indicate what lies beneath the surface of man's heart:

Deep, deep, and still deep and deeper must we go, if we would find out the heart of a man; descending into which is as descending a spiral stair in a shaft, without any end, and where that endlessness is only concealed by the spiralness of the stair, and the blackness of the shaft. (p. 340)

In Clarel the same theme is pursued. In what is avowedly one of the darkest cantos of the poem, the mystery of man's heart is explored in images of darkness and descent. Here the impenetrable mystery is connected with the "mystery of iniquity" (I, 316). The prints of the Italian artist, Piranesi, with their "shadowed galleries" and "stairs upon stairs" descending dimly into pits below are used as the tenor of a metaphor describing the heart of man:

Stairs upon stairs which dim ascend
In series from plunged bastilles drear--
Pit under pit; long tier on tier
Of shadowed galleries which impend
Over cloisters, cloisters without end;
.....

⁴Letter to Evert Duyckinck, February 1851. Thorpe, p. 386. Thorpe, in a note, attempts an explanation of Melville's meaning of heart: "It is a concept which he refers to constantly during these years, usually in opposition to the bloodlessness which results from too abstract speculative thought. Thus it is Emerson's misfortune that he cannot be convivial because 'his brains descend down into his neck.' Even in Hawthorne there is something lacking to the 'plump sphericity' of a man. 'He doesn't patronize the butcher--he needs roast-beef, done rare.' In a significant passage of commentary on 'Ethan Brand' Melville advanced the opinion to Hawthorne that men who have really 'fine brains and work them well' also have hearts that extend 'down to the hams.' He would in general seem to mean by 'heart' a close contact with life, which the 'hearty' man evinces, and the romantic virtues of enthusiasm, spontaneity, and humanitarianism." p. lix, n. 89.

The thing implied is one with man,
 His penetralia of retreat--
 The heart, with labyrinths replete:
 In freaks of intimation see
 Paul's "mystery of iniquity": (I, 316)

Such dark elements demand a depth of understanding which the mere genial drinker of ale will never be able to provide. Thus, when Melville allies himself with the heart, it is not an alliance with superficial sentiment but with a profound and comprehensive understanding of human goodness and evil intuitively apprehended.

Despite his exalted appreciation of the value of the heart, Melville does not seriously consider the organ, operating alone, as a sufficient guide for men. The interpenetration of head and heart is essential, as we shall see below.

Nathalia Wright, in exploring the meanings of head and heart in Mardi, suggests that Melville's literary life was a search for the whole man, for such a man as Babbalanja describes to King Abbrassa:

Cerebrum must not overbalance cerebellum; our brains should be round as gloves; and planted on capacious chests. . . . We have had vast developments of parts of men; but none of manly wholes. Before a full-developed man, Mardi would fall down and adore. (II, 322-323)⁵

Such a description suggests the full development of both head and heart and indicates the balance which must exist between the two for man to attain his proper stature. The two organs are, then, not inimical but complementary.⁶

⁵Nathalia Wright, "The Head and the Heart in Melville's Mardi," PMLA, LXVI (1951), p. 351.

⁶This attitude of the complementary quality of head and heart is a constant factor in Melville. The only major deviation from it is Pierre who declares himself the protagonist of the heart alone: "Well may this head hang on my breast,--it holds too much; well may my heart knock at my ribs,--prisoner impatient of his iron bars. Oh, men are jailors all; jailors of themselves; and in Opinion's world ignorantly hold their noblest part a captive to their vilest; as disguised royal Charles when caught by peasants. The heart! the heart! 'tis God's anointed; let me pursue the heart." (p. 107).

Pierre's ultimate failure, however, may be interpreted as a consequence of his fanatical decision to be guided by one organ alone.

This suggestion of the necessary co-existence of head and heart is emphasized by several passages concerning Hawthorne, of whose greatness Melville had written, ". . . it is not the brain that can test such a man; it is only the heart."⁷ In a letter to Hawthorne, from which we have already quoted, Melville provides his fullest explication of his meaning of the term "heart":

It is a frightful poetical creed that the cultivation of the brain eats out the heart. But it's my prose opinion that in most cases, in those men who have fine brains and work them well, the heart extends down to the hams, and although you smoke them with the fire of tribulation, yet, like veritable hams, the head only gives the richer and better flavor.⁸

This alliance between head and heart was one already suggested by Hawthorne in his description of Ethan Brand, a description which Melville took to be applicable to Hawthorne himself and which he quoted in his review of Mosses from an Old Manse:

His face was full of sturdy vigor, and with some finer and keener attribute beneath; though harsh at first, it was tempered with the glow of a large, warm heart, which had force enough to heat his powerful intellect through and through.⁹

Thus, the intellect, cold in itself, must for the "full developed man" be heated through by the fire of the heart. Such a heart, as we shall see in section 3, far surpasses the pallid organ attributed to Nehemiah or the Old Man of Serenia.¹⁰ The capacious heart which can warm the head is not one which has cut itself off from realities,

⁷"Hawthorne and His Mosses." Thorpe, p. 333.

⁸Letter to Hawthorne, June 1851. Thorpe, p. 392.

⁹For Melville's use of this quotation, see his review, "Hawthorne and His Mosses." Thorpe, p. 341.

¹⁰Among the Serenians and with Nehemiah, the heart is an organ exclusive of the head, symbolic of love, and the sole approach to the mysteries of faith. With this in mind, Taji's refusal to stay in Serenia becomes clear. The reason why the Serenians fail to win him to their way of life is not because he insists upon a course of speculative reasoning (head), but rather because the heart represented by them is itself not a fully developed organ.

either pleasant or unpleasant, but one which both know how to enjoy its cakes and ale and to endure pain. The man with such a heart does not make the mistake of equating the human heart only with geniality and brotherly love but is realist enough to admit that not only love but often enough sin and dark secrets lie hidden in the hearts of men.¹¹

2. Protagonists of the Head

Bearing in mind Melville's seasoned judgements on the inadequacy of the head, we will not be surprised that Clarel contains no important champion of the ascendancy of the head.

The blatant inadequacy of the head without the heart had been caricatured in The Confidence-Man in the characters of Mark Winsome and his Practical Disciple, Egbert. The latter is the man who lives solely by the laws of logic and the scenes in which he functions provide an ironic dramatization of such a manner of life.¹²

In Clarel, Margoth, in his role as scientist, is a caricature of the man of pure intellect, and, as such, provides an implicit condemnation of the folly of judging all things under the formality of "knowledge". Margoth is excluded from all values which cannot be explained in terms of scientific investigation. He is incapable of awe or reverence in the face of mystery because he will not admit that there is any mystery incapable of intellectual explanation.

¹¹Babbalanja suggests the complexity of the human heart in a passage addressed to Yoomy: "'Go, Yoomy: go study anatomy . . . I curiously look into my secrets and grope under my ribs. I have found that the heart is not whole but divided.'" (Mardi, II, 351)

¹²The Practical Disciple acts according to a code which excludes the heart. Egbert lives by logic, and through his logic demonstrates incontrovertibly that the principles of fraternal charity are actually injurious to man. His neat casuistry turns the world of brotherly love upside down and leaves no basis for human relations except his own cold laws of logic (pp. 212-254).

Thus, he jeers at the attitude of the pilgrims at the Dead Sea (I, 309-311), at the religious mysteries proposed by the Dominican friar (I, 278), and most brutally of all, at Nehemiah's death which he interprets as mere chemic reaction (I, 329).

Rolfe, whom we have defined as the speculative man (Ch. I, sec 3), does not ally himself solely with the intellect. This becomes unequivocally clear if one compares Rolfe's reactions with those of Margoth. Although the former does evidence a certain skepticism in describing the ritualism of the Easter Fire ceremony (II, 78-82) and in his attitude toward the mystic palm (II, 139-141), nevertheless, instances can be multiplied of his deep reverence for those religious mysteries which can be apprehended only by the heart.¹³ Far from being allied with the values upheld by Margoth, Rolfe, despite his penchant for speculative thought, indicates the necessity of the heart. Clarel makes this clear when, in attempting to evaluate Rolfe's position, he remarks:

. . . . Sterling--yes
Despite illogical wild range
Of brain and heart's impulsive counterchange.
(I, 256)

All of these utterances serve to illustrate Melville's impatience with a philosophy of life based upon purely speculative reasoning. In Pierre the hero had compared the heart to "the preserving salt," indicating that "the brains grow maggoty without a heart" (p. 377). This metaphor neatly indicates the necessity of both organs and their mutual interdependence.

3. Protagonists of the Heart

The two principal champions of the heart in Clarel are Derwent

¹³A few of the most important passages follow: Clarel, I, 252-256, 278-283; II, 206-213, 221-223.

and Nehemiah. However, such an identification within this single theme does not in any substantial way span the gulf which separates them, for although they are thus united in an anti-intellectualism, the motives which prompt their attitudes stem from divergent philosophies of life.

Clarel's first mystic meeting with Nehemiah establishes the latter beyond doubt as the protagonist of the heart. The old man, seeing that the student is without a guide, proffers to him the book of Scripture which he has always with him:

"Consult it, heart; wayfarer you,
And this a friendly guide, the best;
No ground there is that faith would view
But here 'tis rendered with the rest:
The way to fields of Beulah dear
And new Jerusalem is here." (I, 37)

The relationship between heart and faith, suggested earlier in the Sepulchre canto (I, 14-20), is here made explicit. Nehemiah's book of revealed truth must be consulted by the heart. This address to the heart is one of the significant characteristics of Nehemiah's speech, as we shall see in the passages below. Later in this canto the same form of address is repeated: "'Heart, come with me,'" he demands, offering to show Clarel the noteworthy portions of Jerusalem and its environs (I, 38). Again, as he guides Clarel on a tour of the ancient Wailing Wall he offers a tract to a passing Jew with the injunction:

"Tis Hebrew, look,"
Zealous he urged; "it points the way,
Sole way, dear heart, whereby ye may
Rebuild the Temple." (I, 67)

From these several utterances we may abstract a certain conclusion concerning the place of the heart in Nehemiah's religious thought. For him, the Scriptures (and he admits of no other access to religious truth) can be approached through the heart alone. Thus, love becomes

the sole key for approaching the mysteries of revealed truth. Such a scheme provides no avenue for the attainment of religious truth except that of unquestioning acceptance. Nehemiah's fideistic spirituality makes no provision for either doubt or intellectual disputation.¹⁴ One must approach religious truths only through the heart; what is involved is always a contact by love. In such a code, there is no answer for the questioning mind or for the deep problems of the despairing heart. Nehemiah, although he frequently addresses himself to the unbeliever, can be heard with profit only by the believer.¹⁵

So closely does Nehemiah's attitude and religious mission parallel that of the Mardian figure, the Old Man of Serenia, that some analysis of the latter may help in interpreting the meaning which Melville intends Nehemiah to have.

Both of these figures are protagonists of the heart. The gentleness of the Serenian's invitation, "'In blessed Alma's name, I pray you, come!'" (II, 361) is similar to the attitude of Nehemiah toward Clarel. Serenia, "the land of love" (II, 362) and type of primitive Christianity, has much in common with the New Jerusalem which Nehemiah hopes to establish.

In matters of religious creed the Serenians, like Nehemiah, repudiate an intellectual doctrine and depend solely upon the inter-

¹⁴See Chapter VII, section 2 for a discussion of fideism.

¹⁵Frank Griffith suggests that Father Mapple, like the Serenians, is understood only by the believing heart: "Mapple can provide consolation, an inner delight, only to the believing heart. For the mind which drives outward in an attempt to discover the cause of evil, the meaning of death, the certainty of immortality--in brief, the Eternal significance of the historical act--for that mind, he has nothing to offer." (Melville's Search for God, p. 160). Father Mapple's sermon provides conclusive evidence, however, that his concept of the human heart is far deeper and more inclusive than that of Nehemiah (Moby Dick, Ch. ix).

pretation of their hearts. Their spokesman explains to the Mardian visitors: "'We have no priests, but one; and he is Alma's Christ self. We have his precepts: we seek no comments but our hearts'" (II, 369). Babbalanja, who finds in Serenia the answer to his quest, reiterates this doctrine of the sufficiency of the heart: "'Within our hearts is all we seek: though in that search many need a prompter. Him I have found in blessed Alma!" (II, 380).

Serenia represents essentially and exclusively the sphere of love. Here Media and Babbalanja are content to rest, having found not the ultimate mystery but a way of life. The Utopian existence provided by Serenia is based first of all upon a simple love of Alma and a consequent practice of his precepts of fraternal love. The Serenians have the first belief that man's heart is not the source of iniquity but of good. The effective result of this belief in man's essential loveableness is a code of Christian charity based directly upon the injunctions given by Alma himself. Contrary to the emphasis placed upon creed in the island of Maramma where heresy is punished by torture and death (II, 33), the emphasis in Serenia is placed exclusively upon brotherly love. This whole code of charity is summed up in the dialogue between Babbalanja and the Old Man:

"Tell me not of your endeavors, but of your life. What hope for the fatherless among ye?

"Adopted as a son."

"Of one poor and naked?"

"Clothed, and he wants for naught."

"If ungrateful, he smite you?"

"Still we feed and clothe him."

"If yet an ingrate?"

"Long, he cannot be; for love is a fervent fire."

"But what, if widely he dissent from your belief in Alma;--then, surely, ye must cast him forth?"

"No, no; we will remember, that if he dissent from us, we then equally dissent from him. . . . Nor will we say that he is wrong, and we are right; for this we know not, absolutely. But we care not for men's words; we look for

creeds in actions; which are the truthful symbols of the things within." (II, 365)

This open avowal by the Serenians of their disinterest in speculative truth and their emphasis upon operative charity prefigures the role of Nehemiah in Clarel. Nehemiah is not interested in sects--he came alone to Jerusalem and is not financed by any mission (I, 35)--but in the pure Christianity expressed in the Gospels; like the Old Man of Serenia, he needs no guide but that of the precepts of Christ as they are expressed in the Scriptures. He narrates but one New Testament episode and this is the parable of the Good Samaritan, the testament of brotherly love par excellence (I, 204). Nehemiah's unflagging hopefulness in offering his tracts despite the scorn and indifference with which he is generally treated in his apostolic mission is reminiscent of the devoted affection with which the Serenians treat even the unbelievers and ingrates among them.¹⁶

Perhaps the most significant commentary on the sphere of the heart as represented by Nehemiah is the fact that the hero finds it inadequate for his needs. The indication throughout Parts I and II of Clarel is that although Nehemiah's simple vision of the heart is sufficient for his own fulfillment (I, 325-326), it is not sufficient for Clarel. As the cavalcade sets out, we are told:

He, Clarel, with the earnest face
Which fitful took a hectic dye,
Kept near the saint. (I, 177)

But the deeper that the pilgrims journey into the wilderness, the more foolish appears Nehemiah's unquestioning fideism.¹⁷ The sterility of the desert, the loneliness and despair depicted by the

¹⁶For examples of Nehemiah's apostolic failure, see Chapter II, note 8.

¹⁷Nehemiah's fideism appears particularly foolish as he attempts to clear the desert of stones, explaining to the perplexed pilgrims, "All things are possible with God" (I, 213).

Dead Sea need vaster solutions than the simple scope of Nehemiah's heart can provide. Clarel here again parallels the course of Taji who could not be satisfied with the values presented by the Serenian's and so was forced to journey onward in his quest. (II, 400).¹⁸

The second protagonist for the ascendancy of the heart is the liberal clergyman Derwent. Although Derwent's polished utterances are glossed by a sophistication far from the guileless iterations of Nehemiah, in essence their position on the point of head and heart is similar. Derwent is impatient with speculative thought and its adjuncts. His facile optimism, with its belief in the innate goodness of man places, as one would expect, heavy emphasis upon the role of the heart.

In the interminable debates which occupy the travelers throughout their pilgrimage, Derwent consistently commits himself to a type of anti-intellectualism. Actually, the clergyman is impatient of argument for he is convinced that intellectual probing will never provide answers to man's deeper needs.¹⁹

Following the visit of the pilgrims to the shrines of Bethlehem, Ungar, shaking off the spell, begins to doubt their authenticity. Derwent replies in a rather contrived and unconvincing metaphor that while the head may find reasons for doubting, the heart--man's most profound organ for the perception of truth--responds to the claims made by the holy shrines, and this is enough. He presumes to conclude his argument by the thought:

"Though much we knew in desert late,
Beneath no kind auspicious star,
Of lifted minds in poised debate--
'Twas of the brain. Consult the heart!
Spouse to the brain--can coax or thwart
Does she renounce the trust divine?

¹⁸See Chapter I, section 4.

¹⁹See Chapter VII, section 3.

Hide it she may, but scarce resign;
 Like to a casket buried deep
 Which, in a fine and fibrous throng,
 The rootlets of the forest keep--
 'Tis tangled in her meshes strong." (II, 233)

His speech, however, is not received enthusiastically by his listeners, and Ungar in particular asserts that he is talking in mere generalities which lack firmness and depth:

They hearken: none aver dissent,
 Nor one confirms him; while his look
 Unwitting an expression took,
 Scarce insincere, yet so it lent
 Provocative to Ungar's heart;
 Who, bridling the embittered part,
 Thus spake: "This yieldeth no content:
 Your implication lacketh stay:" (II, 234)

Ungar here underscores a vital lack in Derwent's "faith"--it lacks a strong intellectual content.

The Anglican's impatience with speculative thought in general leads to an impatience with matters of religious creed. As Rolfe watches in amazement and horror the Bethlehem Arabs turn their backs upon the Christian shrines in order to fulfill their own Islamic devotions, Derwent, with an easy liberalism, defends them. His argument suggests the extreme of latitudinarianism, as he comments that as long as the supreme being is worshipped it matters little under what formality the worship is offered:

. . . "Yes, for they pray
 To Allah. Well, and what of that?
 Christ listens, standing in heaven's gate--
 Benignant listens, nor doth stay
 Upon a syllable in creed:
 Vowels and consonants indeed!" (II, 196)

For Derwent, as for the Serenians and Nehemiah, creed is unimportant, for religious truth is approached not through the head but through the heart. Unsympathetic with the intellectual probings of Clarel, he interrupts with:

"My fellow-creature, do you know
That what most satisfies the head
Least solaces the heart? Less light
Than warmth needs earthly wight." (II, 107)²⁰

Needless to say, Clarel finds no more strength or solace in the superficial utterances of Derwent than he did in the pious platitudes of Nehemiah. The positions of both the aged Evangelical and the modern Anglican are equally inadequate for the problems which the hero probes. It is not, as we shall see more fully in discussing the plight of the hero (sec. 6), that Clarel seeks a wholly intellectual answer; he does not. But what is of the greatest importance to note is that in the essential interdependence of heart and head in Melville's thought, the man who ostracizes the head in order to extend the kingdom of the heart in reality only succeeds in diminishing the heart's domain as well. This we have seen in the case of the Old Man of Serenia and his counterpart, Nehemiah. It is also true of Derwent who, although he is not unaware of the dark portion of man's heart, refuses to acknowledge it, and, instead, upholds a philosophy which admits only the bright side of man's nature. To Clarel's impassioned questions, he replies:

. . . . "Alas, too deep you dive.
But hear me yet for little space:
This shaft you sink shall strike no bloom:
The surface, ah, heaven keeps that green;
Green, sunny: nature's active scene,
For man appointed, man's true home." (II, 109)

²⁰Clarel, II, 107. Newton Arvin's declaration that these lines of Derwent represent Melville's own position is certainly questionable. The attitude toward Derwent never rises above a mild toleration and often descends to scorn. In the face of such an attitude it seems hardly possible that the reader is asked to accept Derwent's position as the author's own. While it is true, as Arvin maintains, that Melville expresses in Clarel an "unqualified rejection of science," it is at best tenuous to equate science with the head. As we have already suggested (Ch. I, sec. 3) the facile positions of both Margoth and Derwent are equally rejected as representing a distortion of truth. See Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, "The American Men of Letters Series" (New York, 1950), pp. 283-284.

Thus, the dominion of the heart is narrowed to a certain natural benevolence toward one's fellow men and a sentimental response to religious stimuli. Such a position is essentially unacceptable to the seeker of the whole vision.

4. The "full-developed man"

Both Celio and Mortmain find their places in this section, although it is only the latter who achieves a successful synthesis of the organs of both head and heart. Celio, although he does not reach this goal, is important in underscoring the problems which beset the man seeking such an interpenetration.

The problem underlying all of Celio's difficulties in this sphere is that of an apparent opposition between head and heart. Clarel had ruminated upon the general possibility of such an opposition in Canto xxxvi, "The Tower!" As the pilgrims stand looking down from Mount Olivet, Clarel watches their expressions, seeking to catch some indication of their secret thoughts. Although he admits that their hearts seem touched by contact with this sacred place, he wonders if their minds have given full assent to the mystery of Christ's Ascension which is here commemorated:

All leave at last. And these remain
As by a hearthstone on the plain
When roof is gone. But can they shame
To tell the evasive thought within?
Does intellect assert a claim
Against the heart, her yielding kin? (I, 143)²¹

This problem receives dramatic confrontation in the case of Celio. Like Clarel, Celio has led a studious life, and to some extent his religious problems have been prompted by his studies:

²¹The pronoun "these" in line 1 is vague in antecedent; but in the total context it seems safe to presume that it refers to Clarel's fellow pilgrims.

Leading a studious life at will,
And prompted by an earnest mind,
Scarce might he shun the fevered sway
Of focused question in our day. (I, 47)

His response to these "focused questions" involves both head and heart. Celio, despite his intellectual skepticism, is emotionally bound by the traditions of his faith, and each allusion to the mysteries of his childhood creed evokes a painful ambivalence. When he follows the funeral mourners in their traditional procession of faith, his initial impulse is that of emotional conformity, yet, within the instant, this is checked by his rejecting head:

Out sobbed the mourners, and the tear
From Celio trickled; but he mused--
Weak am I, by a myth abused. (I, 57)

The climax of Celio's head-heart ambivalence occurs in the canto, "The Arch" (I, 51-54). Looking up to the traditional scene of Christ's condemnation by Pilate and the Jewish mob, Celio explicitly states the problem of being drawn by the demands of his heart to a creed which his intellect cannot accept:

Behold Him--yea--behold the Man
Who warranted if not began
The dream that drags out its repulse
Nor less some cannot break from Thee;
Thy love so locked is with Thy lore,
They may not rend them and go free:
The head rejects; so much the more
The heart embraces--what? the love?
If true what priests avouch of Thee,
The shark Thou mad'st yet claim'st the dove. (I, 53)²²

Celio's sudden death terminates the possibility of synthesis. His importance in the thematic problem of the head and the heart is to provide dramatic presentation of a certain apparent opposition,

²²Clarel, I, 53. In *Mardi*, the poet Yoomy had suggested the opposite position. Upon being told while visiting Maramma of the horrors of the future life, he exclaims, "'Could I, I would not believe it. It is at variance with the dictates of my heart; instinctively my heart turns from it, as a thirsty man from gall'" (*Mardi*, II, 34).

an opposition which is harmonized in Mortmain's achievement of the full-developed man.

It is Mortmain who comes closest to the ideal interdependence of a fiery heart and a keen intellect. Mortmain in his youthful political schemes had permitted himself to be ruled solely by his heart:

Precocities of heart outran
The immaturities of brain. (I, 188)

The cause of world progress to which he had vowed himself, however, was not a cause to be pursued by the heart alone but demanded for success a penetrating intellect as well.²³ "Strong hearts, brows deep, and priestly hands"--all three were necessary, Mortmain learned for the political ideal which he had espoused (I, 188). Disillusioned not only by the apparent failure of his plans but also by the selfish treachery of those whom he had considered his allies, Mortmain turns to solitude, searching for primal answers to the mystery of suffering and evil of which he had become increasingly aware. It is in these terms that we must understand the Swede's vigil in the desert with its single question: "If God but be-- but be!" (I, 232).

Unlike Celio and Clarel, Mortmain is impelled in his search for truth not by speculative questions suggested by his studies, but by tragedy which has struck at the heart. His illegitimacy, his mother's lack of maternal understanding and sympathy, his thwarted political idealism all play their part.²⁴ This tragedy of heart,

²³Clarel, I, 189. Sedgwick emphasizes this interaction of head and heart in Ahab: ". . . we shall miss the point of his tragedy if we forget that Ahab combined a ponderous heart with a globular brain. There lies his anguish" (Herman Melville, p. 103).

²⁴See the whole canto devoted to Mortmain's background, I, 187-191.

however, reaches out beyond the purely personal suffering caused by his own experience to embrace the larger scope of the mystery of pain as it touches all mankind:

He, under ban
Of strange repentance and last dearth
Roved the gray places of the earth.
And what seemed most his heart to wring
Was some unrenderable thing:
'Twas not his bastardy, nor bale
Medean in his mother pale,
Nor thwarted aims of high design;
But deeper--deep as nature's mine. (I, 191)

Although Mortmain is propelled in his quest by a tragedy of heart, he does not seek an answer solely in terms of the heart. He is, as we shall see below, a man in whom the intellect plays a large part.

The reactions of the pilgrims indicate their awareness of Mortmain's keen intellectual activity. Several times they comment on his active mind. The superficial Lesbian, describing the Swede's activities at the Greek monastery, notes the time he spent in the library, suggesting that his eccentricity might be the result of too much knowledge:

"I saw him there, yes, quite at home
In long-abandoned library old,
Conning a venerable tome,
While dust of ages round him rolled;
Nor heeded he the big fly's buzz
But mid heaped parchment leaves that mould
Sat like the bankrupt man of Uz
Among the ashes, and read and read.
Much learning has it made him mad?" (II, 131)

Following Mortmain's death, the importance of his intellectual activity is again emphasized by some of the pilgrims who feel that an over-stimulation of the head was indirectly responsible for his death:

Some divined
That long had he been undermined
In frame; the brain a tocsin-bell

Overburdensome for citadel
Whose base was shattered. (II, 151)

Mortmain's own words emphasize his vast store of knowledge, but also indicate that he realizes the inadequacy of knowledge alone. Shortly before his death, he cries:

"Wiser am I--Curse on this store
Of knowledge: Nay 'twas cursed of yore.
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER: tell that to knaves;
'Tis knavish knowledge: the true lore
Is impotent for earth: 'Thyself
Thou canst not save; come down from cross!"
(II, 135)

Pure knowledge, he suggests, unless it is guided by a principle higher than itself, is the instrument of those knaves who turn it to their own selfish ends. "True lore" cannot be explained in terms of the cold speculative intellect, for the highest wisdom transcends earthly values and can be expressed only in paradox. The quotation which Mortmain employs to prove his point is the jibe uttered by Christ's enemies as they watched Him die upon the cross. They interpreted the scene in terms of their superficial vision, but what their mockery failed to realize was that this scene of earthly failure signified a profound spiritual triumph. Mere human knowledge will never provide the key to life's mystery; wisdom alone will do that, and wisdom is a matter of the heart as well as of the head. Mortmain does not suggest that Christ's knowledge excludes or opposes earthly knowledge, but rather that it subsumes it into a heavenly wisdom informed by love. The problem of suffering, inexplicable in terms of human reason, can be resolved only in terms of a wisdom heated through by the heart.²⁵

²⁵Melville had once written to Hawthorne: "The reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch." Letter of June 1851. Thorpe, p. 392.

Mortmain's symbolic black cap, which covers his head, further emphasizes the role of the head in his mystery of pain. The episode of the giant eagle (II, 124-125) brings the symbolic significance of the skull cap into relief. As Mortmain broodingly overlooks the chasm of Mar Saba, a gier-eagle swoops over him, and, snatching the cap from his head, carries it down into the Kedron gulf:

A great bird crossed high up in sky
 Over the gulf; and, under him,
 Its downward flight a black thing took,
 And eddying by the path's sheer rim,
 Still spun below:

 Oh, the hag,
 That from the very brow could pluck
 The cap of a philosopher (II, 124-125)

Shortly after this, occurs Mortmain's revelation beneath the palm tree, followed by his mysterious death. In context, the symbolic value of the eagle episode would seem to be that Mortmain's intellect, hitherto darkened, has been enlightened, and is now free to operate fully in conjunction with his heart in accepting a final revelation which makes its appeal to the whole man.²⁶

5. The problem of the hero

Clarel, as hero, passes in his pilgrimage from the polarity of the head to that of the heart when that organ is understood according to the definition provided in section 1 of this chapter. Beginning his journey as a student who seeks answers through speculation

²⁶This action of an eagle swooping upon the head of man--an action baffling in its hidden symbolism--occurs in two other places in Melville. In *Moby Dick* (Ch. cxxx), Ahab, perched aloft, is attacked by a savage sea hawk who succeeds in flying off with the captain's hat. In *Clarel* (II, 129), the Lesbian tells of the same fate overtaking Agath.

Walter Bezanson notes this recurrence of the eagle image in Melville's works, and points out that while in *Pierre* it is at the heart that the birds strike (p. 360), in *Clarel* it is at the head. This suggestion is in accord with the interpretation which we have placed on the gier eagle. Bezanson, *Clarel*, p. 236.

and theory, he ends as a matured young man who, while not repudiating the role of the intellect, places high value on intuition and experience.

As Clarel determines to join the pilgrimage soon leaving Jerusalem, the narrator poses a question which underscores the specific importance of this journey for the young student:

In heart what hap may Clarel prove?

Brief term of days, but a profound remove. (I, 168)

Despite the limited time which the journey will consume, it is to open to Clarel a profound experience of the heart.

Throughout Part I it is significantly reiterated that Clarel has been, so far, a student, a "learner" (I, 6). Now, recognizing the insufficiency of his role of student, his soul, full of "bookish vapours", seeks to be purged and set free for "nature's influx of control" (I, 1-3). His mind, "long confined apart like Vesta in a grove collegiate" (I, 6), has at last left the world of books and entered into the world of men. He is determined to find the solutions for the "under-formings in the mind" (I, 5) which have lately disturbed him. He realizes, however, that the purely theoretical solutions presented by the learned tomes will not suffice. In his first lonely night in Abdon's hostel, he murmurs as he looks over the city:

"But here unlearning, how to me

Ope the expanse of time's vast sea!

Yes, I am young, but Asia old.

The books, the books not all have told." (I, 5)

It is, then, to the world of men, to the world of experience that Clarel turns for solutions to the problems which vex him. Unfortunately for the success of the poem, those questions are never explicitly defined. Clarel talks of his problems largely in generalities. He speaks of "faith", of "primal doubt", of "nature" and

"supernature" often without any further specification. As a result, it is equally difficult to find explicit definition of what he hopes to achieve by his pilgrimage. It is safe to say, however, that the pilgrimage becomes for him significant of values far different from those he had initially expected.

Beginning his quest as a student, he attempted to solve speculative problems in speculative terms. He listened eagerly to the interminable discussions of his fellow travelers in order to find answers to his baffling doubts (I, 192). Although he is not disappointed in the wide range of opinions and attitudes represented by such divergent personalities as the liberal Derwent, the eclectic Rolfe, the Dominican friar, and the rest, he finds no permanent solution in any of their views. In terms of pure argument Clarel's pilgrimage leaves him in much the same state as it found him.²⁷

Yet Clarel does learn; but what he learns is largely a matter of the education of the heart. He comes to realize that there are many things which cannot be understood in terms of pure cerebration. He learns of attitudes which he had not known to exist--attitudes far from the "one poor and casual form" (I, 6) which had hitherto formed his religious opinions. He learns, too, how unsatisfying are the answers of other men to the problems which are his unique burden. Derwent, Rolfe, and Vine, of all the pilgrims, exert the greatest influence, yet none of these three satisfy him. Derwent's patronizing geniality refuses to face the issues which Clarel presents. The young hero is forced to admit that the Anglican has failed to meet his "confutation" (II, 31). Derwent's text: "Rejoice ye evermore." finds no response in Clarel.

²⁷Since this theme runs throughout the poem, it is impossible to isolate passages; the following passages are important loci, however: I, 252-256, 271-282, 305-308; II, 100-109, 260-268.

Rolfe, too, although diving deeper than Derwent, does not provide a satisfactory solution for Clarel's spiritual problems. As Rolfe discourses on the Holy Places, Clarel comments:

For though the words might frankness claim,
With reverence for site and name;
No further went they, nor could fill
Faith's measure--scarce her dwindled gill
Now standard. (I, 133)

Most disappointing of all to the student is his inability to share Vine's deeper thoughts (II, 34). Clarel is forced to face the individuality of the human heart and to concede that the ultimate solution must be found in terms of each man's individual experience. Gradually, the unadulterated logic of the student is tempered by the experience of the maturing hero.

The most profound and extensive influence upon Clarel's heart is that of Ruth, through whom he first recognizes the power and beauty of human love (I, 109). This relationship is a complex affair which can be understood only in terms of a larger thematic pattern--the conflict of asceticism and the natural life. This theme provides the material for Chapter VI. It is sufficient here to indicate that Clarel's awakening to human love is an important element in the development of his heart.

It is suffering which is the major force in the maturation of Clarel's heart. A certain spiritual disappointment meets him at every turn: at the shrines of Jerusalem he is unable, despite his expectations, to evoke an attitude of faith (I, 29); his loneliness is augmented by his inability to respond to the advances of Celio (I, 44, 60); his separation from Ruth, in whom he had hoped to find an ideal love, further saddens him (I, 165); he is humiliated by Vine's rejection of his proffered affection (I, 284); and finally, the deaths of Ruth and Agar complete his tragic molding (II, 289).

Throughout these experiences, Clarel becomes increasingly aware of the heart's capacity for suffering, and aware, also, that tragic experience is a means to wisdom. With each succeeding pain, he becomes increasingly impatient with the guilelessness of Nehemiah, the optimism of Derwent, and the putative speculations of Rolfe.

More and more, Clarel is drawn to Mortmain despite the Swede's wild mien, for he senses a sound realism behind his apparent madness. Mortmain, however, is an example of the price to be paid in terms of suffering and Clarel, even toward the very end of his journey, is besieged with a temptation to fly this painful education of the heart. Realizing, however, that to withdraw from the "common uninquiring life" (II, 274) can represent only a retreat from the values of truth, he determines, despite the cost, to pursue his course. The passage in which his temptation is delineated is significant in pointing up the meanings which he, at the end of his journey, places upon the heart:

But whither now, my heart? wouldst fly
Each thing that keepeth not the pace
Of common uninquiring life?
What! fall back on clay commonplace?
Yearnest for peace so? sick of strife?
Yet how content thee with routing
Worldly? how mix with tempers keen
And narrow like the knife? how live
At all, if once a fugitive
From thy own nobler part, though pain
Be portion inwrought with the grain? (II, 274)

In this poise of mind, he is brought face to face with the last act in the maturation of the heart: the death of Ruth. The education of Clarel's heart has not only succeeded in revealing to him the depths and mysterious secrets hidden within each man, but has also sensitized him to suffering, so that Ruth's death has a climactic intensity for him. The pain which he endures at this event far exceeds anything he has previously experienced:

With piercing cry, as one distraught,
Down from his horse leaped Clarel--ran,
And hold of that cloak instant caught,
And bared the face. Then (like a man
Shot through the heart, but who retains
His posture) rigid he remains--
The mantle's border in his hand,
His glazed eyes unremoved. . . . (II, 284)

Although this final pain brings him close to the edge of despair,
he continues to wait and hope in an anguish of soul:

. . . . His visage calm
Seemed not the one which late showed play
Of passion's throe; but here divine
No peace; ignition in the mine
Announced is by the rush, the roar:
These end; yet may the coal burn on--
Still slumbrous burn beneath the floor
Of pastures where the sheep lie down. (II, 289)

The final advice addressed to Clarel in the Epilogue is in terms
which the hero (who at the beginning of the poem would have spurned
them) is now in a position to understand:

Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-resigned--
Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind; (II, 298)

It is, undoubtedly, these lines which lead James Baird to say that
the poem ends with "Clarel's rejection of reason and his acceptance
of only the 'primitive heart'".²⁸ While it is quite true that the
heart wins over the head, it is a heart which is not in conflict
with what Baird calls the "over-reason" or head. Such an explanation
as Baird indicates seems to suggest a return to the primitive fideism

²⁸Baird's judgement is made in connection with his study of Melville's use of the reef as symbol: "The reef, mounting through the waters of the mind, is to be both the barrier against the sea and the rock of death to the islander who ventures into the ocean beyond it. Interpreted through its Oceanic images, this passage means that Clarel (the Ishmael voyager) creates in the scepticism of his quest the reef of his own destruction. The reef is the boundary between the 'inner' life of primitive acceptance and the 'outer' life of over-reason, of man's aspiring search for absolute truth." Throughout my analysis I have followed the contrary point of view, assuming that "man's aspiring search for absolute truth" is a good to which Clarel ultimately dedicates himself completely. See Ishmael, pp. 354-355.

of the Serenians, but the total context of Clarel suggests otherwise.

These lines from the Epilogue assume their proper significance only when understood in the light of the distinctions suggested earlier in this chapter. It would be injurious to Melville's thought as a whole to delimit the meaning of heart to no more than a sort of feminine organ suggesting a mild affection. Even more untrue would be a view which sees an inimical relationship between head and heart. Here as elsewhere Melville is preoccupied by apparent contradictions which can be brought into real harmony once a denominating factor has been discovered. When, writing to Hawthorne, he cries, "To the dogs with the head. . ." his exclamation must be understood in terms of choice. If one must live by one or the other, then it is better to live by the heart than the head.

Actually, however, Melville suggests that one need not make such a choice because we are dealing with complementary organs. It is the duty of the head to provide rational basis for the action of the heart; it is the duty of the heart to warm the head and its cold logic. The exclusion of either one of these actions will limit the proper function of both organs. Melville's "full-developed man" (for whom he was seeking as early as Mardi) is the man in whom the knowledge of the head is heated through by a loving heart in order that both may be subsumed into true wisdom.

future.

Within the limits of the present study (view) three distinct views are presented.

1. the past is considered as a whole and the only true view of the past is the present.

¹Letter to Hawthorne, November 1851. Thorpe, p. 368.

PERMANENCE AND CHANGE

Yes, God is God and men are men,
Forever and for aye. What then?
(Clarel II, 248)

In November of 1851, the month of the publication of Moby Dick, Melville wrote in concluding a letter to Hawthorne:

This is a long letter, but you are not at all bound to answer it. Possibly, if you do answer it and direct it to Herman Melville, you will missend it--for the very same fingers that now guide this pen are not precisely the same That took it up and put it on paper. Lord, when shall we be done changing? Ah, it is a long stage, and no inn in sight, and night coming and the body cold.¹

This passage indicates a major and persistent theme of Melville's mind: the problem of time. It was inevitable that he, with the tentacles of his mind always reaching out toward an immutable, should become absorbed in the mystery of time.

We may best approach the complexities of this theme as it appears in Clarel through a general statement of the problem and its implications, and then by a consideration of the major attitudes toward this problem as displayed by the pilgrims. Two large classifications of attitudes may be recognized: the first consists of the pilgrims who, in their consideration of time, are preoccupied with the past; the second, consists of those who look primarily to the future.

Within the first group (which may be called the regressive view) three attitudes toward the past are manifest:

1. the past is considered as an escape from an evil present and provides the only true basis for living (the attitude of Nathan);

¹Letter to Hawthorne, November 1851. Thorpe, p. 395.

2. the past is repudiated as a dead culture (the attitude of Margoth and the Presbyter);
3. the past is consulted as a teacher in the tentative hope that it may provide answers to contemporary problems (the attitudes of Clarel and Celio).

The second (or progressive) group turns toward the future. The protagonists of this view base their positions upon the law of inevitable generation, but they differ in their attitudes toward such progression. Here, too, three categories may be distinguished:

1. progress is viewed as an unequivocal good which will lead inevitably to the perfection of man and his world (the attitude of Derwent);
2. progress, while admitted as an undeniable element, is not conceded to be an unmixed good. The new life which proceeds inevitably from the old may be a degeneration rather than a perfection of what has preceded (the attitude of Ungar);
3. progress is viewed not as an undeviating progression toward either growth or decay, but as a cyclical pattern in which elements are inevitably repeated (the attitude of Rolfe).

1. The Problem and its Implications

The problem of permanence and change, as we have already indicated (Ch. I, sec. 1), is directly related to the whole major problem of truth. Melville in wrestling with the possible relativity of truth had found himself faced with two theories: truth may be relative because of the unreliable and impermanent testimony of the senses which are man's only avenue to truth, or, more essentially, truth may be in constant flux because it is not independent of time. In the latter case, man is doomed to wander helplessly in a chaos of mutability. This is epistemological nihilism. Into

this morass Pierre steps and in its depths The Confidence-Man is conceived.²

Such skepticism is, however, repudiated in Clarel. The peculiar duality of Melville's vision in his later years forces upon him a simultaneous awareness of both mutables and immutables. Although at times one may seem to suffer because of an emphasis placed on the other, the friction between them indicates an active habit of thought which seeks a mature harmony.

The argument of Clarel accepts as a basic premise the existence of certain absolute values. The pilgrimage is otherwise meaningless. The problem here is not the speculative one of determining the possibility of immutables, but a problem of a more practical order. It may be stated thus: in actual practice, what is the interaction of permanence and flux, of the eternal order and the historic order. The postures of the various pilgrims represent dramatically the possible responses to this basic question. Nathan in his search for

²William Sedgwick, who interprets Clarel as a reaction, in both theme and form, to Pierre, explains Melville's concern with historical fact and setting in the former in terms of a refuge and protection from the insecurities of the earlier novel:

On his Eastern travels Melville was reaching out for counterpoises to the inner world of consciousness which had opened beneath him in Pierre. He was searching for the "sensational presentiment" of something the opposite to what he experienced in Pierre, a principle, like the law of gravity itself, to counterpoise the anarchy and disintegration of the individual's consciousness when left to its own centrifugence. The first step was to secure a different perspective from his perspective in Pierre, in which all objects and all relationships decompose before the frightful imminence of an empty infinity. The only alternative to oppose to that perspective was the concrete of history. . . . What we come to feel in reading his travel journal through is that Melville was putting himself to a personal and sensational experience of antiquity, the multitudinous variety, and the continuity of history. (Tragedy of Mind, p. 201)

Although agreeing with Sedgwick in his suggestion that Clarel represents a conscious effort at a control which had been lost in Pierre, it is difficult to acquiesce in Sedgwick's high evaluation of the verse form. The use of tetrameter couplets doubtlessly imposes a restraint but hardly of a sort compatible with the needs of Melville's theme.

the absolute repudiates time and immerses himself in a dead past; Celio and Clarel also turn to the past but not in repudiation of the present but only in hope that past values will teach them to cope with present problems; Derwent's blithe optimism directs him to repudiate the past and place his belief in the perfectibility to be achieved merely through the passage of time; Ungar, while recognizing that one must submit to temporal flux, assumes that "progress" --loosely so-called--may be pointed toward decay as well as growth.

As we shall see, none of these attitudes receives a wholesale endorsement. They all fail in some way to see a full vision because they insist on setting up as independent two domains which, in actual practice, interpenetrate each other. The temporal order is, of its essence, an order of change; to attempt to perpetuate it as it existed at any one period of time is as false and injurious as to categorically deny the existence of any absolute order. One is wrong both in attempting to make the temporal order immutable and in refusing to acknowledge the permanence of absolute values. The full truth is that both orders, although governed to some extent by their own peculiar laws, are interactive domains.

Indicating his emblematic view of the universe, Melville, in his famous passage in Moby Dick, suggests that absolutes can be known only through concrete manifestations in time. Such a view, while not the major point of this passage is part of its ideological structure:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning this puts forth the mouldings of its feature from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall?
(p. 161)

The "pasteboard mask" is the temporal manifestation; the "reasoning

thing" behind it is the immutable value. But the former, although of less essential value, is a necessary avenue for approaching the latter.

This is not an isolated utterance. In Pierre, too, the same idea is repeated. As the hero thinks of the tragically beautiful face of Isabel, he muses:

. . . thou hast evoked in me profounder spells than the evoking one, thou face! For me, thou hast uncovered one infinite, dumb, beseeching countenance of mystery, underlying all the surfaces of visible time and space. (p. 59)

The same attitude occurs in Clarel, although here there is no single expository statement which one can cite as conclusive evidence. The conclusion can be reached only by a careful exploration and evaluation of the attitudes assumed by the pilgrims. The harmony of the relative and the absolute is difficult to establish and, as we shall see in the following sections, none of the pilgrims, with the possible exception of Rolfe, succeeds in attaining it.

2. Escape to the Past

Two of Clarel's pilgrims, Vine and Nathan, see the past as the only hope for a Utopian existence. Vine, however, does no more than contemplate past civilizations with the passive eyes of a dreamer; it is Nathan alone who attempts to actualize his dreams.

Vine's attitude is that of an aesthete for a never-never land which he realizes is only a fantasy. In assessing the merits of the wild Arab tribesmen whom they meet on the pilgrimage, Vine allies himself with a commonplace, cultural primitivism. He comments on the grace, strength, and wisdom of the Arabs, hoping to find beneath their wild exterior "thoughts refined" because of their ancient culture (I, 285). Again, in a soliloquy at Mar Saba, Vine manifests

his views toward the past. Although he evinces deep reverence and sympathy for the civilization represented by the monastery, he neither reverts to the values it offers nor attempts to distil from it values for his own nineteenth century life. Vine's attitude here seems to be that of a dreamy aesthetician who sees the past as an object for contemplation rather than for action, as his own utterance confirms:

"For my part, I but love the past--,
The further back the better; yes,
In the past is the true blessedness;
The future's very overcast--
The present aye plebeian. So,
Mar Saba, thou fine long-ago
Lithographed here, thee do I love;
And yet to-morrow I'll remove
With right good will; a fickle lover
Is only constant as a rover." (II, 126)

Vine's wistful glances toward the past represent merely the banalities of nineteenth century thought. The past of Nathan, however, poses a far deeper meaning and is more central to the development of the theme of time.

Clarel's first meeting with Nathan takes place at the Wailing Wall. This is symbolically significant since this ancient wall is a decaying remnant of a dead past. Here the Jews come to recall their past glory and to beg for a deliverance which has already been accomplished:

There, lord of all,
The Turk permits the tribes to creep
Abject in rear of those dumb stones,
To lean or kneel, lament and weep;
Sad mendicants shut out from gate
Inexorable. Sighs and groans;
To be restored! we wait, long wait!
They call to count their pristine state
On this same ground. (I, 66)

From Nehemiah, Clarel learns the story of the "strange apostate" (I, 66).³ Nathan had been reared in a code of Christian orthodoxy,

³See the whole canto, "Nathan," I, 69-79.

but in his youth was brought, through his reading, to a position of total skepticism. His love for the Jewess, Agar, was instrumental in his conversion to the Jewish faith, and soon the converted Nathan was more zealous than his wife for the enforcement of Judaic customs. Flaming with zeal to re-establish primitive Judaism, he comes to Jerusalem with Agar and their two children.

He quiets his doubts about such an unusual step, with the following reasoning:

"Nay, and turn Hebrew? But why not?
If backward still the inquirer goes
To get behind man's present lot
Of crumbling faith; for rear-wall shows
Far behind Rome and Luther--What?
The crag of Siani. Here then plant
Thyself secure: 'tis adamant." (I, 75)

Nathan in his reversion to the past is not satisfied with finding elements which can be employed in his modern existence. His regression is complete: he is determined to live in the past with a total disregard for the changes wrought by time.⁴ Nathan's blind pride in sacrificing his family to an impossible ideal, his fanatical indifference to the dangers of marauding Arabs (symbols of encroaching time) all spell out his inevitable ruin.⁵ It is not without signifi-

⁴Nathan's primitivism may be classed as chronological rather than cultural. As early as *Mardi*, Melville had professed little sympathy with an antiquarian attitude toward life. To bury oneself in the past solves nothing, he suggested in his satire on the antiquarian, Oh-Oh, who inhabited the island of Padulla. As the voyagers descend into the darkness of the catacombs to see Oh-Oh's collection of antiquities, Babbalanja comments, "Why Lord, this is like going down to posterity." What they find at the end of their quest ("mummyish parcels, so dingy-red, and so rolled upon sticks, that they looked like stiff sausages of Bologna") is sufficient indication that to Melville's mind such an artificial preservation of the past is meaningless. (*Mardi*, II, 72-76). The dramatic failure of Nathan in his attempt to revert to a lost civilization indicates that Melville's attitude in this matter had changed little.

⁵Throughout the poem, the Arabs are constantly represented as encroaching upon the ancient Jewish past. See the passage on the Wall of Wail in this same chapter.

cance that the metaphor which Melville uses to describe Nathan's final ruin is that of time as a beast of prey which finally encompasses his victim:

But time the cruel, whose smooth way
Is feline, patient for the prey
That to this twig of being clings;
And Fate, which from her ambush springs
And drags the loiterer soon or late
Unto a sequel unforeseen;
These doomed him and cut short his date; (I, 78)

Nathan is doomed to failure. His narrow vision condemns him to an unreal posture which could not hope to succeed.

3. The Past Repudiated

The simplest and most obtuse reaction to the problem of the past is that of total rejection. This is the course taken by both the geologist, Margoth, and the Presbyterian of the Grampian Kirk.⁶ Although the atheist scientist and the old covenanter have little in common, they are alike in looking toward the past and rejecting all they find.

For the geologist "all's chemistry" (I, 329)--science of changing reactions. Each new advance in science is a signal for a fresh repudiation of the past from which it has sprung. Margoth, viewing Jerusalem, symbol of time past, cries:

"Stale is she!
Lay flat the walls, let in the air,
Wake up the dead; and let there be
Rails, wires, from Olivet to the sea,
With station in Gethsemane." (I, 250)

As he continues to discourse about the errors and superstitions

⁶Under one formality, Margoth might have been placed in section five, "The Golden Future." While it is true that he is a progressive, he seems even more important in his negative aspect of wholesale condemnation of past values. It is for this reason that this section is devoted to his position.

of the past, the narrator ironically comments that Margoth breaks the "bread of wisdom" and reveals "things the prophets left unsaid."

. . . . the gossip tells
Of things the prophets left unsaid--
With master-key unlocks the spells
And mysteries of the world unmade; (I, 250)

Totally lacking in reverence or understanding for the "proven half" (I, 49) of time, he views the past as some outmoded fable, a fairy story from which children must be weaned. Earlier, as the pilgrims looked out over the wilderness, Margoth had cried:

"Sirs, heed me:
This total tract," and Esau's hand
He waved; "the plain--the vale--Lot's sea--
It needs we scientists remand
Back from old theologic myth
To geologic hammers. . . ." (I, 249)

He illustrates his method by explaining that just as science has proved that the desolation of the Phlegraeon fields was caused not by Jove's thunder bolts but by volcanic cone, so now he is ready to free men from the Biblical myth and prove that the fate of Sodom and the surrounding cities was due to purely natural causes (I, 249).

Within Margoth's world there is no permanence; it is a world of flux based on an interpretation of chemical change. There are no norms by which to evaluate progress because progress itself has become the only norm. As the pilgrims discuss the problem of Biblical exegesis, Margoth sees in this but one more proof of shifting values:

With eye askance
The apostate fixed no genial glance:
"Ay, Keith's grown obsolete. And, pray,
How long will these last glosses stay?
The agitating influence
Of knowledge never will dispense
With teasing faith, do what ye may.
Adjust and readjust, ye deal
With compass in a ship of steel." (I, 295)

Immutable disappear within the chaos of natural change. To

Marmoth, the past represents only the negative value of decay.

The position assumed by the Presbyter, although directed toward a different goal, has much in common with that of Marmoth. He, too, is determined to set aside all tradition and disprove all legend, to shove aside "time's violet mist" (I, 173). He is as impatient with the past as Marmoth, although he is propelled not by scientific truth but by what he fancies is an enlightened religious truth. He does not deny the existence of immutables but he pursues his search for them not within the frame of time but in a rejection of time. His enlightened faith has room only for the essentials, and with a heavy hand he attempts to rout the relics of the past. The comment of the narrator is sufficient indication of the catastrophic end to which the Presbyter's action will lead:

Traditions beautiful and old
Which with maternal arms enfold
Millions, else orphaned and made poor,
No plea could lure him to endure.
.....
Deeming he served religion there,
Work up the fag-end of Voltaire,
And help along faith's final crash--
If that impend. (I, 173)

Many years earlier, Melville had prophesied a similar doom for his young hero, Pierre. Pierre, determined to repudiate his heritage in the cause of truth throws his father's picture into the fire and follows this with packages of family letters. Then, watching the flames change all to ashes, he cried:

"Thus, and thus, and thus! on thy manes I fling fresh spoils; pour out all my memory in one libation!--so, so, so--lower, lower, lower; now all is done, and all is ashes! Henceforth cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammelled by his ever-present self!--free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!" (p. 233-234)

Pierre in repudiating his paternity attempts to repudiate time

itself and stand out from historical fact, freed, as he thinks, to seek his own truth and work out his own destiny.⁷ Such an effort, despite the caliber of the hero, was, in Melville's philosophy, an impossibility. No man can cut himself off from time, and though he may, to some extent, effect his own destiny this will always be in terms of an accomplished past. This is one of the significations of the narrator's comment in Moby Dick when speaking of Ahab's present tragedy:

Nor, at the time, had it failed to enter his monomaniac mind, that all the anguish of that then present suffering was but the direct issue of a former woe; and he too plainly seemed to see, that as the most poisonous reptile of the marsh perpetuates his kind as inevitably as the sweetest songster of the grove; so, equally with every felicity, all miserable events do naturally beget their lot. (p. 460)

Thus, man lives within the frame of time, and Pierre's repudiation of this essential truth bears within it the germs of his final tragedy.

4. The Past as Teacher

Clarel himself provides the best example of the attitude which reverts to the past in order to acquire values for contemporary living. Such an attitude represents a mature investigation of the problem of time.

⁷Melville in The Confidence-Man had also condemned this false progressivism represented by the Cosmopolitan who blandly depreciates everything but hope in a glorious advancement. "Pray, now," he asks the Mystic, "Why disturb the repose of those ancient Egyptians? What to us are their words or their thoughts? Are we pauper Arabs, without a house of our own, that, with the mummies, we must turn squatters among the dust of the Catacombs?" (p. 218). Such an attitude is opposed not only to the emphatic interest in an historical past shown in Clarel but to Melville's consistent philosophy of history which saw the past as an active element of the present. The Cosmopolitan, with his assumption that the present is self-contained and the past but dead ashes, lies outside the main stream of Melville's thought, for to Melville the man who cut himself off from the paternity of time could be nothing else but a "pauper Arab."

See also Pierre, p. 7 and Mardi, II, 245.

In a sense, all of the characters in Clarel have a singular interest in the past or else they would not be in Jerusalem which with its various cultural layers is in itself a symbol of time. This interest in the past manifests itself in different ways, however, and is viewed under different formalities. Abdon, the Black Jew, who keeps the hostel in which Clarel stays, also reverts to Jerusalem after a life lived in various parts of the world, but unlike the members of the pilgrimage, he does not hope for a Utopian existence nor seek answers by which to guide his life, but wishes only to die in the security of his ancestors.

Clarel himself chooses Jerusalem as the starting point in his quest for truth because it is the oldest historic link with the facts of Christianity. If the Christian religion has lost its truth by the temporizing or glossing of succeeding ages, then the most sensible attempt to recapture its primal concept will be a reversion to its source. Here one must step warily, however, and not impute to Clarel's regression into the past the motives of a religious primitivist. Clarel does not wish to live permanently in the past, but wants only to sift from the past those values which will enable him to solve the problems with which his contemporary world presents him. In his first night in Abdon's hostel, he meditates:

Needs be my soul,
Purged by the desert's subtle air
From bookish vapours, now is heir
To nature's influx of control;
Comes likewise now to consciousness
Of the true import of that press
Of inklings which in travel late
Through Latin lands, did vex my state,
And somehow seemed clandestine. . . . (I, 5)

Clarel is searching for "time's vast sea" (I, 5) which he opposes to the narrow provincialism of the New World which, despite its optimistic progress, lacks that large tradition which alone

effects wisdom. "Yes, I am young, but Asia old" (I, 5); Clarel concludes, with the implication that the ancient continent will reveal to him the answers he seeks.

In this respect, Clarel and Celio are impelled by the same attitude. Celio, disappointed in all that life has offered him, seeks another world to replace the one which has failed him (I, 49).

James Baird suggests that such motivation provides the source for authentic primitivism which he defines as "a mode of sentience, a creed springing inevitably from a state of cultural failure. . . It is a willful exit from crisis and from the chambers of the dead and the dying, as these manifestations of failure are interpreted in the moral view of the primitivist."⁸

Such, certainly, is the case of Celio. In his desire for stability, he turns from the unfulfilled hopes of Europe and of the New World, as well, to that proven security furnished by an historical past:

The Past, the Past is half of time,
The proven half.--Thou Pantheon old
Two thousand years have round thee rolled;
Yet thou, in Rome, thou bid'st me seek
Wisdom in something more antique
Than thou thyself. . . .

.
Methinks I catch a beckoning sign,
A summons as from Palestine.
Yea, let me view that pontiff-land
Whose sway occult can so command;
Make even Papal Home to be
Her appanage or colony. (I, 49-50)

Celio wishes to go beyond Rome, center of Roman Catholicism, not only to the seat of Christianity but beyond this to the Biblical past of Judaism with its mystic symbol of the seven-branched candlestick, sign of God's abiding presence.

The comment of the narrative voice with which this canto is con-

⁸Baird, Ishmael, p. 3.

cluded may be applied to Clarel as well as to Celio. It is a presage that the pilgrimage to the Holy Land will stir up values far different from those which were sought:

But who may well indeed forecast
The novel influence of scenes
Remote from his habitual Past
The unexpected supervenes;
Which Celio proved. 'Neath Zion's lee
His nature, with that nature blent,
Evoked an upstart element
As do the acid and the alkali. (I, 50)

The hero, standing in Jerusalem, traditionally the center of the world, symbolizes the contemporary man poised in a moment of time, sifting the values of the past, probing the values of the future, attempting to find through the ceaseless ebb and flow of civilizations those immutables through which his life will achieve meaning. He is the man of the New World submitting to the influence of an ancient culture (I, 5). Clarel, in exact contradiction to Pierre, who in a single gesture attempted to cut himself off from his paternity, delves as deep as it is possible to go into a historic past in his quest for truth. This reversion does not represent an escape; Clarel does not attempt to slough off his nineteenth century problems to revel in Arcady. This attitude is true of Melville's heroes generally; when they return to the past it is usually in the hope that there they will learn the secret for solving their contemporary problems. Nathalia Wright, in discussing Melville's use of the past, comments:

The ancient past. . . towers up everywhere, a presence of which he was constantly aware. . . . It is this persistent nature of the past, in fact, which is most important in Melville's conception of it. It could not represent escape to him as it could do to Schopenhauer. . . . For the past he saw was not a separate segment of time but an inextricable part of the present, of which the ruins

strewn upon the earth are but the most obvious evidence.
From them each succeeding age is built. . . .⁹

Although Clarel's basic attitude remains one of the most mature in the poem, it is not a total answer. Clarel tends to confuse the temporal order with the order of permanence. He is too quick to judge that the depressing physical decay which exists around him represents a decay of what should be immutable elements. This confusion between the temporal order and the eternal order is suggested by Walter Bezanson in slightly different terms but with the same implications for Clarel:

This double mystery, this sense of things one moment being rich in deep historical traditions and symbolical values and the next moment being no more than simple physical objects, is a dualism that is to haunt the young student

⁹Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible, pp. 178, 180-181. This generalization is particularly true of Clarel in which there is no need to conjure up a past by means of metaphor or allusion since the locale itself creates the past. The nineteenth century city of Jerusalem still retains in its ruins and monuments the evidence not only of a Biblical past but of succeeding ages which have swept over the city, modifying it to their own cultures. Here Melville's preoccupation with strata of time is graphically satisfied.

Miss Wright's next sentence needs a qualification, however; "... time, as he consistently personified it is the mason not the destroyer." While it is true that Melville indicates his belief in one civilization rising from the ruins of another, there are passages in which time is certainly the destroyer rather than the builder. See Pierre, p. 8; Clarel, I, 39, 64, 78.

William Runden in his investigation of the imagery of Melville's shorter fiction, and Walter Weber in studying characteristic symbols in Melville's work, both comment on the imagery evoked from the concept of layers of time. Runden writes:

One is led to think of time as a series of layers. The thin uppermost layer is the present and recent past; the next layer includes the Renaissance and Medieval periods. Beneath them lies the classical period. Further down lie the time strata of the Old Testament and of Egyptian and Hindoo mythology. Still deeper lie the primitive ages of prehistoric monsters, and ultimately the period of the creation of the earth itself. (Imagery in Melville's Shorter Fiction, p. 128).

Weber's classification is a close parallel of Runden's. Walter Weber, "Some Characteristic Symbols in Herman Melville's Works," English Studies, XXX (1945), pp. 216-218. See Baird's comment on Melville's use of the material suggested in Weber's system of stratification (Ishmael, p. 188).

this as he journeys through Palestine. . . . He alternates rapidly between two worlds. Nor can Clarel find a ground of compromise between them or a means of integrating them. He is whirled back and forth between super-natural and natural attitudes.¹⁰

This is why Clarel fails to supply a satisfactory solution; a full harmony of the problem of time must include the ability to recognize immutables in successive guises.

5. The Golden Future

The three following sections, although indicating diverse attitudes, are all concerned with future time. All of these groups, however, accept the premise, already presented, that the past is an integral part of the present and the future. Thus, time is made up of succeeding ages each of which grows, decays, and becomes the base of the age which follows.

In the Holy City, the physical manifestation of successive civilizations are evident. The traveler may descend into layers of vanished cultures. Remnants of a Biblical past, of primitive Christianity, of the Crusades stand beside the encroachments of an Arabian present:

. . . . They rove the storied ground--
Tread many a site that rues the ban
Where serial wrecks on wrecks confound
Era and monument and man;
Or rather, in stratifying way
Bed and impact and overlay.
The Hospitallers' cloisters shamed
Crumble in ruin unreclaimed
On shivered Fatamite palaces
Reared upon crash of Herod's sway--
In turn built on the Maccabees,
And on King David's glory, they;
And David on antiquities
Of Jebusites and Ornan's floor,
And hunters' camps of ages long before. (I, 39)

Again, the narrator looking at the scene about him sees subsumed in

¹⁰ Bezanson, Clarel, pp. 289-290.

this present moment all the eras which have gone before. It is this awareness which causes him to comment:

List to the hand-mills as they drone,
Domestic hand-mills in the court,
And groups here in the dear resort,
Mild matron pensive by her son,
The little prattler at her knee:
Under such scenes abysses be--
Dark quarries where few care to pry,
Whence came those many cities high--
Great capitals successive reared,
And which successive disappeared
On this same site. . . . (I, 64)

While this is physically true in Jerusalem, it is spiritually true everywhere. In this sense, the topographical imagery of the Holy Land has a cosmic significance.

It is, perhaps, in the exploration of the meaning of progress and its relation to the past that Clarel provides its most significant utterances concerning the problem of time.

For Derwent, progress has but one meaning: cosmic perfectibility. All problems, spiritual, political, physical will be solved in time. Man has only to wait patiently for the millennium which inevitably approaches.¹¹ In time there will be a new religious creed, a new political order which will spell happiness for all men (I, 243). Progress is inevitable:

. . . true reform goes on
By nature; doing, never done.
Mark the advance: (I, 244)

This last passage is a mild echo of the ironic panegyric

¹¹As early as Mardi, Melville had repudiated that philosophical optimism which holds that truth will inevitably triumph. As the voyagers look toward the northern shore of Hamora (Africa), they see as many crescents as they do crosses, and Babbalanja remarks:

"How vain to say that progress is the test of truth, my lord, . . . when after many centuries, those crescents yet unwaning shine and count a devotee for every worshipper of yonder crosses. Truth and Merit have other symbols than success; and in this mortal race, all competitors may enter; and the field is clear for all. Side by side, Lies run with Truths, and fools with wise; but, like geometric lines, though they pierce infinity, never may they join."

(II, 247-275)

addressed to progress by the narrator in Pierre:

Hosannahs to this world! so beautiful in itself, and the vestibule to more. Out of some past Egypt, we have come to this new Canaan; and from this new Canaan, we press on to some Circassia. Though still the villains, Want and Woe, followed us out of Egypt and now beg in Canaan's streets: Yet Circassia's gates shall not admit them; they, with their sire, the demon Principle, must back to chaos, whence they came. (p. 37)

Unlike Margoth, Derwent's hope for the future does not lead him to a rejection of the past. He not only realizes that the present must grow out of the past but even evinces a casual interest in the cultural bequests of preceding civilizations. But Derwent's concern with Greek sculpture, ancient literatures, and classical mythology is never more than superficial and subsidiary.¹² All of this he sees only as an ornament for the modern world which it may aesthetically enrich. Derwent is always concerned with being a la mode. His clothes, his manner, his wit are all a "happy fit" for the age. The narrator in his first description of him comments:

In Derwent like wise might you find
The secular and cleric tone.
Imported or domestic mode,
Thought's last adopted style he showed;
Abreast kept with the age, the year,
And each bright optimistic mind,
Nor lagged with Solomon in rear, (I, 172)

Nehemiah makes Derwent ill at ease with his old-fashioned remarks which "so ill accord" (I, 205) with the times. His contempt for the past is clearly evident in his petulant reply to Ungar's eulogy on the Middle Ages:

"This bric-a-brac-ish style (outgrown
Almost, where first it gave the tone)
Of lauding the quaint ages old--
But nay, that's satire; I withhold.
Grant your side of the shield part true:
What then? why, turn the other: view
The buckler in reverse. Don't sages
Denominate those times Dark Ages?" (II, 198)

¹² See Clarel, I, 253; II, 106.

His conversations with Rolfe indicate his belief in the intrinsic good of scientific progress. As Rolfe comments contemptuously on the materialistic view professed by Margoth, Derwent cautions that science has "her eagles" and is to be respected as an avenue to truth (I, 252). To Rolfe's wistful reminiscence of a time when "man clasped a deity's offered hand" (I, 254), Derwent has no answer except the facile comment:

"And for thy picture of the Prime
Green Christianity in glade--
Why, let it pass; 'tis good, in sooth:
Who summons poets to the truth?" (I, 255)

In the face of Rolfe's skepticism, he maintains, "Time runs on and much that's useful, grant, is won" (I, 253).

It is, however, in his conversations with Clarel that he reveals his theory of the relationship between time and matters of religious faith. On this subject, the canto, "In Confidence" (II, 100-109), provides a key text.

As Clarel vainly attempts to offer his problems to Derwent for solution, the Anglican welcomes this "frank communion" (I, 102), never doubting his ability to resolve the conflicts of Clarel's heart. In reply to the youth's bitter picture of the world drifting like a rudderless ship with no one to guide her, Derwent applies the solution of time. "You're young, you're off the poise" (I, 102), he answers, suggesting that with maturity Clarel will no longer suffer the pangs of insecurity. Clarel, unsolaced, continues his perplexed recital of creed fighting creed until it seems that Christianity itself has become nothing but a mockery.¹³ To this, Derwent opposes his theory of change which, he suggests, can be applied to religious creeds since this, like everything else, is mutable. This long

¹³ See Ch. III, sec. 3; Ch. VII, sec. 3.

passage is, perhaps, the clearest manifestation of Derwent's position:

Have Faith, which, even from the myth,
Draws something to be useful with;
In any form some truths will hold;
Employ the present-sanctioned mould.

.....
Suppose an instituted creed
(Or truth or fable) should indeed
To ashes fall; the spirit exhales,
But reinfunds in active forms. (II, 105)¹⁴

Working out this theory by illustration, he describes the course assumed by the pagan priest at the waning of his mythology. Even though his faith in Apollo has been destroyed, he continues his customary ritual which, although but an empty ceremonial act, is better than nothing:

"But go back--well,
Reach to the years of first decay
Or totter: prithee, lad, but tell
How with the flamens of that day?
When brake the sun from morning's tents
And walked the hills, and gilded thence
The fane in porch; the priest in view
Bowed--hailed Apollo, as before,
Ere change set in; what else to do?
Or wither turn, or what adore?
What but to temporise for him,
Stranded upon an interim
Between the ebb and flood? He knew?-- (II, 106)

In matters of faith, as in all else, the single guiding principle of the liberal minister is to follow the times; forsake the past and trust in the new order. Derwent's solution is to seek no solution, except to await the course of time in which he is willing to place all his hope.¹⁵ Once again, he admonishes Clarel, telling him

¹⁴Italics mine.

¹⁵Derwent's optimism is an echo of the Confidence Man who had diddled the Missourian by his argument that "the vices of boys are transitory and will be outgrown by virtues, just as their first teeth are replaced by strong second ones." (The Confidence-Man, p. 129)

that his serious view of life is no longer popular:

"But ween you, gentle friend, your way
Of giving to yourself the goad
Is obsolete, no more the mode?" (I, 108)

Clarel's impassioned reply to this is full condemnation of Derwent's superficial position:

For here, with speed
Of passion, Clarel turned: "Forbear!
Ah, wherefore not at once name Job,
In whom these Hamlets all conglome.
Own, own with me, and spare to feign,
Doubt bleeds, nor Faith is free from pain!"
(II, 109)

6. Progress as Decline

Ungar, the American ex-patriot, also turns his eyes toward the future, but he shares none of Derwent's golden vision. Derwent, in explaining his theory of progress, had said:

". . . . Through all me thinks I see
The object clear; belief revised,
Men liberated--equalised
In happiness. No mystery,
Just none at all; plain sailing." (II, 242-243)

In answer to this optimism, Ungar has the bitterest of testimonials.¹⁶

Ungar has lived through the ravages of the American Civil War as a Union soldier. He bears a sabre scar on his neck, powder burns upon his face, and the far more painful wound of disillusionment in his heart (II, 157). His "lyric" as the pilgrimage wends its way toward Bethlehem is a vengeful caveat to the blind and treacherous

¹⁶It is ironically appropriate that Ungar is an American, since America is, throughout Melville's work, a symbol for progress. In Mardi, America had assumed the symbol of youthful promise under the name of Vivenga. Yet even in Mardi, Melville was cautious in evaluating this "young tropic tree" which is laden with opulence. Several observations of the Mardian voyagers indicate that youth, no matter how gifted, is not to be fully trusted until it attains that maturity which can come only with the experience of years. See Mardi, II, 175, 230, 252.

leaders of progress:

"Elating and elate
Do they mount them in their pride?
Let them wait a little, wait,
For the brimming of the flood
Brings the turning of the tide." (II, 180)

His indictment of this spurious progress is twofold: it has played false with God, dislodging Him from His rightful supremacy and, in so doing, it has played false with man who will never find happiness in a world cut off from God.¹⁷ Although in America the natural resources of the country may retard the inevitable surge of class warfare, time will eventually bring America to its ruin, a ruin only hastened by the folly of democratic government:

"Whatever happen in the end,
Be sure 'twill yield to one and all
New confirmation of the fall
Of Adam. Sequel may ensue,
Indeed, whose germs one now may view;
Myriads playing pygmy parts--
Debased into equality:
In glut of all material arts
A civic barbarism may be:
Man disennobled--brutalised
By popular science--atheised
Into a smatterer--" (II, 249-250)

Don Hannibal, the Mexican "reformado reformed" (II, 238), reiterates Ungar's attitudes, although with less passion and complexity. He, too, has come to the Holy Land to escape the ravages of progress, one of the worst of which he considers to be democracy. Both he and Ungar agree that the vital flaw of democracy is her repudiation of the past and her vain presumption in her own unaided powers:

". . . . "Ay, Democracy
Lops, lops; but where's her planted bed?
The future, what is that to her
Who vaunts she's no inheritor?

¹⁷Two successive cantos are devoted to Ungar's views; II, 242-256.

'Tis in her mouth, not in her heart.
 The Past she spurns, though 'tis the Past
 From which she gets her saving part--
 That Good which lets her Evil last." (II, 240)

In vaunting that she is "no inheritor" she repudiates the Past which could have provided some stability. Don Hannibal asserts that he will not be satisfied until he liberates himself from the toils of "cursed progress." Like Ungar, he, too, sings a caveat of the coming ruin as he leaves the pilgrims:

"House your cattle and stall your steed:
Stand by, stand by for the great stampede!"
 (II, 241)

The ruin which the Mexican and Ungar predict in the political and social orders is, however, but a minor segment of the total destruction. The poverty and brutality which are augmented under the guise of progress are but invisible manifestations of that deeper ruin of man's spirit which has caused him to repudiate God. In the Revolution of 1789, whatever may have been its outrages, Christ was still regarded as a "bleeding Man, the People's friend" (II, 245); but in the new political conflagrations, the cross was used as a clothes-stand. The "impieties of progress" (II, 246) leave no place for faith which Ungar likens to an iceberg stranded on an alien shore. Progress says, in effect, to God:

"How profits it, And who art Thou
 That we should serve Thee? Of Thy ways
 No knowledge we desire; new ways
 We have found out, and better. Go--
 Depart from us; we do erase
 Thy sinecure: behold the sun
 Stands still no more in Ajalon:
 Depart from us!" (II, 247)

Ungar sees in this total repudiation of the Divinity the most terrible of the advances made by progress.

Clarel, Vine, and Rolfe, listening to the tragic violence predicted by Ungar in the name of progress, feel "misgivings" of their

own as they ponder on the possible arrest of "hope's advance" (I, 202). Even before his meeting with Ungar, Rolfe had forebodings in listening to the optimistic theories of Derwent, and had for the moment allied himself with a pessimism closely akin to that of Ungar:

"Prone, prone are era, man and nation
To slide into a degradation!
With some, to age is that--but that." (I, 202)

Although the pilgrims recognize a certain unbalanced passion in Ungar's denouncements, they are far more deeply impressed by his appraisal of the contemporary scene than by the benevolent and unfounded optimism of Derwent. Long after Ungar's speech is ended, they continue to muse on what he has said, wondering if there is not a terrible truth in the ruin he predicts for the New World, and, indeed, for all mankind:

In stilled estate,
On him, half-brother and co-mate--
In silence, and with vision dim
Rolfe, Vine, and Clarel gazed on him;
Nor dull they were in honest tone
To some misgivings of their own:
They felt how far beyond the scope
Of elder Europe's saddest thought
Might be the New World's sudden brought
In youth to share old age's pains--
To feel the arrest of hope's advance,
And squandered last inheritance. (II, 250)

Rolfe, however, despite the influence which Ungar's pessimism exerts over him is not satisfied by his conclusions, and attempts to construct his own schema for the problem of time.

7. The Cyclic View

Although Rolfe's general tone echoes the pessimism of Ungar and Don Hannibal, when examined more carefully it becomes evident that Rolfe makes a unique contribution to the time theme. His far-ranging mind is not at ease with a position which sees only the inevitable decline of civilization. Although there is some truth in such a

view, there are many phenomena which remain unaccounted for in such a framework. Rolfe assumes a more intellectually sophisticated position by allying himself with a cyclic philosophy of time.

Rolfe indicates a belief in certain immutable values but suggests that these absolutes may manifest themselves in various guises at different times. Thus, although these manifestations are subject to the laws of time (and consequently of change), nevertheless, they are actually but the diverse accidental forms of certain constant values.¹⁸ According to Rolfe's theory, the ebb and flow of material progress takes place always within a larger frame of immutable values. In Mardi, Melville had already spelled out the aphorism that there is nothing new under the sun. Babbalanja, condemning the boasts of progress, cries:

"All we discover has been with us since the sun began to roll; and much we discover is not worth the discovering. . . Fools, fools! Mardi's not changed: the sun yet rises in its old place in the East; all things go on in the same old way; we cut our eye-teeth just as late as they did three thousand years ago. . . . Nothing changes, out of the present, the past. All Mardi's history--beginning, middle, and finis--was written out in capitals in the first page penned. The whole story is told in a title-page."
(II, 306-307)¹⁹

Rolfe's position is closely akin to Babbalanja's.

The existence of God and the nature of the human heart are two of Rolfe's immutables. Following the discussion with the Dominican

¹⁸Rolfe's theory of change is implemented by an image of ebb and flow which occurs several times in the poem. It is used once by Mortmain as he contemplates all things ruled by the inconstant "moon of Fate":

"The flood ebbs out--the ebb
Floods back; the incessant shuttle shifts
And flies, and wears and tears the web." (I, 189)
See also Clarel's use of the image, II, 172.

¹⁹See also Mardi, II, 352. See Christian: "where's the odd? Starts change not in the change of gods." (I, 352)

who champions the unchanging creed of Roman Catholicism, Derwent deplores the folly of feeling that such values can be perpetuated, since time alters not only the earth itself but men as well:

"But here's a thought I still pursue--
A thought I dreamed each thinker knew:
No more can men be what they've been;
All's altered--earth's another scene." (I, 282)

Rolfe stoutly contradicts this position, arguing that "Man's heart is what it used to be" (I, 282).²⁰ It is this understanding of the basic immutability of the human heart, he maintains, that enables the Church of Rome to persist in her unchanging doctrine. Although she concedes to variations within certain outward forms, she has the wisdom to retain her basic verities unimpinged by change.

Rolfe, in attempting to apply his cyclic theory to religious truths, finds himself upon tenuous ground. God is one of the immutables on which Rolfe bases his philosophy, yet this attitude in no way aligns him with an orthodox Christianity. His position is one which needs considerable qualification. In his first meeting with Vine and Clarel he enlarges his religious views. Following his story of the Church of St. Helena, he expresses marked praise for the Roman Catholic monks. To Clarel's surprised exclamation, he explains that Rome shall be always a haven for mankind because it provides for the deepest and most persistent need of the human heart--the need for a god. As long as the world lasts, Rolfe maintains, man will

²⁰Later, Ungar in discussing with Derwent the change wrought in the world through the advent of Christianity, reiterates Rolfe's statement that the human heart is unchanging. Ungar, however, inverts Rolfe's optimistic statement into the darkest pessimism. For him, the immutability of the human heart means simply that its innate evil is impervious to the religious creed which it professes to adopt:

"The world turned Christian, need confess
But the world remained the world, no less:
The world turned Christian: where's the odds?
Hearts change not in the change of gods." (II, 234)

continue to believe in God because man, both in his fears and his joys, will always be conscious of his need for a being higher than himself:

"Yea, long as children feel affright
In darkness, men shall fear a God;
And long as daisies yield delight
Shall see His footprints in the sod." (I, 126)

Following this orthodox statement, there occurs a passage which indicates an agnostic trend which Clarel and Vine find distressing:

". . . . But though 'twere made
Demonstrable that God is not--
What then, it would not change this lot:
The ghost would haunt, nor could be laid." (I, 126)

The majority of Rolfe's utterances, however heterodox they may be, do subscribe to the existence of a God. These immutable values of an existent God and man's belief in Him do not, however, provide an immutable creed, for within the frame of time, God manifests Himself in man by guises which may seem to men's finite minds to be in conflict.²¹

Following the passage quoted above, Rolfe continues his explorations into theology and these lines provide the most important locus for Rolfe's position. As Vine and Clarel stand by, ill at ease before these daring speculations, the speaker continues, commenting on the Egyptian god, Osiris, who had been slain in his conflict with the forces of evil and suggesting that a parallel fate was met by

²¹Such a theology provides for various sects which may be explained as divergent manifestations of a basic verity.

This theory does not appear for the first time in Clarel; it had already been suggested in Mardi under the term, "Alma's Avatars":

"Alma. . . who, ages ago, at long intervals, and in various islands had appeared to the Mardians under the different titles of Brami, Manko, and Alma. Many thousands of moons had elapsed since his last and most memorable avatar, as Alma on the island of Maramma." (II, 31)

Baird in his chapter, "Avatars: Symbols of Reincarnation from the Orient," provides much illuminating background for this problem. Ishmael, pp. 169-225.

Christ:

"Phylae, upon thy sacred ground
Osiris' broken tomb is found:
A god how good, whose good proved vain--
In strife with bullying Python slain.
For long the ritual chant or moan
Of pilgrims by that mystic stone
Went up, even much as now ascend
The liturgies of yearning prayer
To one who met a kindred end--
Christ, tombed in turn, and worshipped there,"
(I, 127)

To Vine's shocked question, "'Hint you. . . in Christ Osiris met decline Anew?'" Rolfe gives a hesitant negative but the long passage which follows underscores Rolfe's preoccupation with the possibility that mythologies succeed each other in cycles.

Using the Ciceronian era as an illustration, Rolfe explains how Christianity arose just as the pagan gods were at the point of greatest decline. He suggests, in turn, that now that the Christian era seems to be declining, man may hope for a fresh manifestation of that immutable divinity which transcends his various avatars:

"To Cicero,"
Rolfe sudden said, "is a long way
From Matthew; yet somehow he comes
To mind here--he and his fine tomes
Which (change the gods) would serve to read
For modern essays. And indeed
His age was much like ours; doubt ran,
Faith flagged; negations which sufficed
Lawyer, priest, statesman, gentleman,
Not yet being popularly prized,
The augurs hence retained some state--
Which served for the illiterate.
Still, the decline so swiftly ran
From state to stage, that To Believe,
Except for slave or artisan,
Seemed heresy. . . .

. . . . But why crowd
Examples here: the gods were gone.
Tully scarce dreamed they could be won
Back into credence; less that
Earth Ever could know yet mightier birth
Of deity. He died. Christ came.
And in due hour, that impious Rome,
Emerging from vast wreck and shame,

Held the forefront of Christendom.
 The inference? the lesson?--come:
 Let fools count on faith's closing knell--
 Time, God, are inexhaustible.-- (I, 128-219)²²

This same cyclical philosophy of religion is repeated (although this time implied rather than stated) as Rolfe ponders upon the values of Bethlehem. The modern age, undergoing a vast religious eclipse, is analogous, he thinks, to that ancient time in which the oracles had "moaned about the world," proclaiming, "'Pan, Pan is dead!'" (II, 186)²³ Yet Rolfe is forced to admit that what the modern age is facing seems far worse than any past eclipse:

. . . . But never word
 Aerial by mortal heard,
 Rumours that vast eclipse, if slow,
 Whose passage yet we undergo,
 Emerging on an age untried. (II, 187)

Despite the pessimism of this last passage the inference seems to remain that another myth will rise up to replace the rapidly vanishing Christian myth which is but an impermanent and contingent manifestation of an immutable and absolute reality. Although Rolfe's constant speculation indicates that he does not rest easy in his own solution, it is his only answer to the encompassing doubt and despair voiced by Ungar.

²²Rolfe does not hold consistently to this positive attitude. Only a few pages further on, he queries:

"That stable proof which man would hold,
 How may it be derived from things
 Subject to change and vanishings?" (II, 236)

It is shifts such as this which force one to conclude that Rolfe is not comfortable with any of his own solutions.

²³See also II, 227. William Plommer (Milton and Melville University of Pittsburgh, 1950, p. 136, n. 32) notes the similarity of this passage to the description of the exile of the pagan deities as described in Milton's "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (lines 178 and 200) and also Paradise Lost, I, 439.

8. A Basis for Harmony

These are the main postures toward the problem of time as they are displayed in Clarel. They represent attitudes which, often simple in themselves, become extremely difficult to evaluate within the total context of the poem. The solutions which they suggest are presented always tenuously and never with full sympathy. Nathan's regression into a past, and his total severance from the present, represents an unreal posture which brings about its own ruin. The position of the Presbyter who, in his zeal for the present order, insists on a total repudiation of the past is manifestly condemned. Derwent, who admits the influence of the past but commits himself to a theory of perfectibility, is likewise condemned. The whole tone of the poem is impatient with that facile optimism which sees the world every day in every way growing better and better. There is more sympathy shown toward Ungar's wholesale rejection of what he terms the "impieties of progress"; yet, Ungar's pessimism leaves no room for a theory of immutables, and on that score he fails to project a satisfactory solution. Rolfe's position, with its place for basic truths and its skepticism concerning the values of progress is, perhaps accorded the most sympathetic treatment. Rolfe's own vacillation, his penchant for eclecticism, however, weakens his essential posture. None of Clarel's pilgrims represents a satisfactory solution.

What basic position, if any emerges from these complex attitudes? In June 1851, Melville wrote to Hawthorne: "But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion."²⁴ This statement

²⁴Letter to Hawthorne, June 1851. Thorpe, p. 393.

illuminates much of the ambiguity in the development of the theme of time in Clarel.

The world is composed of both transient values and permanent values, and each must be treated according to its nature; to act otherwise is to pervert the order on which the universe is built. History is a matter of time, and civilizations are meant to succeed each other in time. To attempt to perpetuate any era, no matter how good it may be, is to petrify it.²⁵ Such a position clearly acknowledges truth which transcends change. The total relativity which Melville had espoused in Pierre and The Confidence-Man he repudiates in Clarel.

In the later work the forces of permanence and change do not represent opposing forces grappling in some gigantic Armageddon bent upon mutual destruction. The truth of one need not necessarily bear witness to the falsity of the other. This is but another facet of Melville's pervasive duality of vision. A statement from Mardi may best illustrate the harmony existing beneath the surface of these apparently warring forces. Babbalanja, accused of inconsistency, replies:

"And for that very reason, my lord, not inconsistent; for the sum of my inconsistencies makes up my consistency, and to be consistent to one's self is often to be inconsistent to Mardi. Common consistency implies unchangeableness; but much of the wisdom here below lies in a state of transition." (II, 160)

This position, expanded from a personal psychology into a philosophy of history, is the clearest statement of the values which emerge from

²⁵On some levels of meaning, Jerusalem represents this process of petrification, but the more obvious symbol is the Wailing Wall. The Wall of Wail no longer has any meaning; its empty formalism is recognized even by the wailers themselves, and yet the effort to retain it continues. It remains no more than a symbol of false permanence in the midst of essential historical change.

Clarel. It is within the frame of immutables that the relentless advances of time continue in the inevitable cycles of growth and decline.

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL

Can Truth betray to pain? how can hurt
come in the path to God? (Pierre, p. 118)

Amid the many fluctuations of Melville's thought, the problem of suffering and evil remains an intransigent factor. It is this problem which lies behind his endless metaphysical speculations and his theological skepticism. This is the probe he uses to test the existence of that benign Deity which orthodox Christianity presents for human worship.

Melville's search for a whole vision necessarily entails the problem of suffering, and, since this is one of the most baffling of human problems, it is easy to understand his emphasis upon it. The whole vision must somehow provide a place for physical and moral suffering in which they will fit as a harmonious part of the larger pattern of truth. Melville assumes as a basic premise the undeniable existence of suffering and evil. His problem was how to explain their existence in terms of a metaphysical harmony, how to provide for them, not as contradictory elements but as component parts of a whole vision.

This is the problem which occupies him in Mardi, Pierre, Moby Dick, to some extent in The Confidence-Man, and in Clarel. It is this continuity of thought to which Frank Griffith refers when, in attempting to unravel the basic meaning of Moby Dick, he indicates that this was an act of that "same creative agent who wrote Mardi three years earlier and who would, five years afterwards, scrawl out the entries in the Journal up the Straits. As much as either, Moby Dick recounts man's struggle to comprehend the hidden God who can explain and justify the barbarous nature of his experience." It is

more than justifiable to see as the basic theme of all these novels "man's struggle to reconcile Eternal benevolence with temporal malevolence."¹

In turning specifically to Clarel, we are faced with a complex interweaving of themes. The pervasive element of suffering and evil succeeds in penetrating many of the other problems. Such inter-relationships make it difficult to discuss this theme purely in its own terms, for it is the very interweaving which is an essential part of Melville's meaning. No topic can be discussed without some reference to suffering and evil precisely because, for Melville, these are pervasive forces from which man cannot escape.²

In the interest of thematic analysis, however, the problem as it shapes itself in Clarel, may be explored under the following formalities: the background of the problem, suffering and evil, suffering and innocence, the value of suffering, and the position of the hero.

1. The Background of the Problem

Melville's unshakeable belief in the reality of suffering and evil is in itself significant in an era which was increasingly prone

¹Griffith, Melville's Quest for God, pp. 154, 156.

²In the interest of both form and meaning, however, it is essential to realize that this theme is subjugated to a larger pattern. Structurally, it is always subordinate to the pilgrimage for truth which remains the organizing symbol of the poem. In terms of meaning, too, suffering and evil remain subsidiary. To interpret this secondary problem as the object of the quest is to narrow Melville's vision and to see it out of its true focus.

Stephen Larrabee insists on a solution to the problem of suffering as the object of Melville's quest in Mardi, Moby Dick, and Clarel. "He returned from his travel disillusioned; nonetheless he persisted in a dog-like hunt for some talismanic secret which should reconcile the world with his soul. . . . Mardi is the first and, perhaps, the clearest account of his search for some answers to the problem of evil that hounded him all his days." "Melville Against the World," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIV (1935), p. 411.

"Hawthorne and His Mosses," quoted in Thorpe, p. 333.

either to ignore these two forces or to glorify them by translating them into illusions. His keen intellect pierced through the flimsy philosophies which attempted to explain away suffering as an illusory phenomenon, and he continued his own lonely search for an explanation to the problem which was to haunt his life.

In a letter to Hawthorne, in whom Melville found his own dark problem mirrored, he ridicules what he calls the "flummery" of Goethe who, despite his genius (which Melville was more than willing to concede), often talked nonsense. He writes:

In reading some of Goethe's sayings, so worshipped by his votaries, I came across this, "Live in the all". . . . What nonsense! Here is a fellow with a raging toothache. "My dear boy," Goethe says to him, "you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must live in the all and then you will be happy!"³

Melville's impatience with this superficial type of Goethean transcendentalism was given violent expression in Pierre by Vivian, the hero of Pierre's novel, who cries:

"Hopelessness and despair are over me, as pall on pall. Away, ye chattering apes of a sophomore Spinoza and Plato, who once didst all but delude me that night was day, and pain only a tickle. Explain this darkness, exorcise this devil, ye cannot." (p. 356)

Such a philosophy, with its attempt to transcend pain, made little impression on Melville who had known too much physical and mental suffering to enable him to accept any such theoretical solution. As we shall see later, however, he is willing to admit that suffering

³Letter to Hawthorne, June 1851. Thorpe, p. 392. Melville speaking of the dark strain in Hawthorne, throws some light on his own position. In his review of Hawthorne's Mosses, he wrote: "Certain it is, however, that this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. For, in certain moods, no man can weigh this world without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance." "Hawthorne and His Mosses," quoted in Thorpe, p. 333.

need not wallow in itself but may find a certain fruition in being directed toward a spiritual goal; nevertheless, this does not lessen the reality of the suffering but only channels what would otherwise be an aimless force.

In Clarel, it is Mortmain who recognizes most clearly the inevitable fact of pain. This he sees as part of man's essential human experience from which there is no refuge. He voices this thought as the pilgrims halt in the arid desert between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. Sitting cross-legged and solitary in that vast waste country, he ponders the inescapable mystery:

" Then where?
A thug, the swordfish roams the sea--
The falcon's pirate in the air;
Betwixt the twain, where shalt thou flee,
Poor flying-fish? whither repair?
What other element for thee?
Whales, mighty whales have felt the wound--
Plunged bleeding through the blue profound;
But where their fangs the sand-sharks keep
Be shallows worse than any deep." (I, 213)

Neither fish nor fowl can elude the fact of pain; whether they flee to the height or the depths, it is there waiting for them.

If Melville was adamant in maintaining the existence of physical evil, he was equally firm in upholding the existence of moral evil. Sin, like pain, was an enduring reality which could not be philosophized away.⁴ Within Melville's lifetime, the waning of Calvinism and the upsurge of transcendental philosophies had combined to diminish a strong moral sense and lessen man's sense of responsibility in the realm of moral evil. Melville, however, was too strongly

⁴As early as Mardi, Melville had asserted the inveterate nature of evil. As the Mardians journeyed through Vivenza they listened to a "voice from the gods" which proclaimed: "' . . . though all evils may be assuaged; all evils cannot be done away. For evil is the chronic malady of the universe; and checked in one place, breaks forth in another.'" (II, 244)

imbued with the tenets of Calvinism, however he may have nominally repudiated them, to accept the "emasculated cheerfulness" of contemporary thought.⁵

Emerson had written: "The good, compared to the evil, is as his own good to his own evil." Thus, the evil which we see about us does not exist in reality but is only a projection of the evil within us. The Emersonian solution for the eradication of evil, then, is merely for man to improve the state of his own mind. Melville in a single stroke penetrated the fallacy in the argument. In a marginal note he wrote: "Perfectly Good Being therefore would see no evil.--But what did Christ see, He saw what made him weep--To annihilate all this nonsense read the Sermon on the Mount, and consider what it implies."⁶ The problem of evil did not, therefore, admit of that relativity with which Emerson attempted to endow it. For Melville, evil was an endemic force whose ultimate cause might be veiled in mystery but of whose reality he never entertained a doubt.

⁵The quoted phrase is that of Frank Griffith who investigates at some length Melville's religious background. He suggests that the disparity between the formal Calvinist teaching to which Melville was subjected in his early years and the "placid optimism" which his parents expressed accounts in large part for Melville's religious dilemma. His mind with its natural sense of evil could find no satisfaction with the "new religious liberalism" with its emphasis on man's "freedom and essential goodness" and the benevolence of nature. Melville's need for truth was too deep to be satisfied by such explanations. Griffith thus sums up what he calls Melville's "fourfold religious predicament": "an acute awareness of temporal evil, a conviction that the universe is either Godless or governed by a malicious God, an unwillingness to live with such terrifying alternatives, the consequent need for religious knowledge." Melville's Quest for God, p. 152. See also pp. 7-12, 109-112.

⁶I am indebted to Miss Foster for pointing out this notation of Melville (The Confidence-Man, p. lxxxi). This attempt to palliate evil is satirized in The Confidence-Man when the herb-doctor tries to gull the Missourian with his specious argument: "From evil comes good. Distrust is a stage to confidence. . . ." (p. 94).

In attempting to thrust aside the veil, Melville was confronted with two large possibilities: suffering may proceed from the unregenerate nature of man, or may be arbitrarily inflicted by a responsible and omnipotent power. Both of these tentative propositions are explored in Clarel. In either case, however, it is a reasoning being which is sought. Melville never seriously considers that suffering might find its ultimate source in some blind force which foments evil purposelessly and unknowingly.⁷

2. Suffering and Evil: Unregenerate Man

In seeking for the responsible power behind the visible manifestations of evil, Clarel fully explores as a possibility man's own evil propensities. Except for Derwent, the pilgrims are generally inclined to take a pessimistic view of human nature.⁸ Mortmain heaps all the suffering and evil of the universe at man's door, and Ungar, too, despite the occasional ambiguity of his terms, indicates that the responsibility must be assumed by man.

As the cavalcade passes by the Garden of Gethsemane, Mortmain exclaims:

⁷Throughout Part II of Clarel, the physical objects which compose the terrain through which the pilgrims pass function symbolically as part of a general pattern of evil. The Dead Sea, the desert itself, the stunted brush, the fuzz of the Sodom apples, the turgid water--all signify a terrible blight; yet this desolation of nature operates not as a principle but only as an agent, to use Ahab's terminology. Concerning the use of nature as an agent, see the two episodes of "accidental" calamity in Mardi (II, 120, 314-315) also Miss Foster's comments on Melville's preoccupation with inexplicable evil (The Confidence-Man, p. 314).

⁸The innate nobility of man was a premise of which even the youthful Melville was wary. In Mardi, the optimistic inhabitants of Serenia, while advocating a ceaseless tolerance and charity, did not hesitate to warn against a belief in man's goodness. They find in his heart a "germ" of good and upon that built their hopes (II, 366-367).

"Man's vicious: snaffle him with kings;
Of, if kings cease to curb, devise
Severer bit. This garden brings
Such lesson. Heed it, and be wise
In thoughts not new." (I, 186)⁹

Such an utterance touches off the Calvinistic credo of reprobate human nature. This idea of a natural reprobation, Melville explores frequently. Such a concept gives rise to such characters as Jackson, Claggart, and Bland--villains who are symbols of innate depravity.¹⁰ It is in Pierre, however, that we find a statement which throws much light on the problem as it is pursued in Clarel. The narrator, seeing an admixture of good and evil in even the best actions, comments: "Ah, if man were wholly made in heaven, why catch we hell-glimpses? Why in the noblest marble pillar that stands beneath the all-comprising vault, ever should we descry the sinister vein?" (p. 127)¹¹

The most extended and direct discussion of this aspect of the problem of evil occurs near the end of Part IV of Clarel, as Ungar attempts an explanation of his position. Following the ex-patriot's turbulent denunciation of the modern world, particularly of America, Derwent in his usual manner attempts to make light of the indictment, suggesting that Ungar's posture is merely the result of personal ill-

⁹Frank Griffith commenting on this passage writes: "Insistently, therefore, he takes his stand on the general depravity of mankind. The curse on the modern world, he declares, stems from the attempt to place man where God should reign. The individual is corrupt, worthless, totally damned. History proves it, Gethsemane proves it." (Melville's Quest for God, p. 350.)

¹⁰Such malignancy is suggested by the one-legged man in The Confidence-Man who gibes: "'Money, you think, is the sole motive to pains and hazard, deception and deviltry in the world. How much money did the devil make by gulling Eve?'" (p. 36).

¹¹This admixture of good and evil is given symbolic implementation in Pierre through the portraits of Pierre's father, one so conservative, so representative of "household" perfection, the other concealing the dark mysteries never to be revealed.

fortune, and would quickly give place to a more optimistic view under "fortune's favourable ray" (II, 251). But Ungar's next declaration indicates that we are here faced with something far deeper than personal spleen. He exclaims:

"What incantation shall make less
The ever-upbubbling wickedness!" (II, 251)

Ungar's quarrel, therefore, is not with the stream of external manifestations of pain but in the fountain head itself: the cause of the physical and moral misery which he has so bitterly experienced.

Vine, in questioning his use of the word "wickedness," stimulates Ungar to an explanation of his meaning of the word, which, he concedes, has lost its vital force through "tampering" and "light sacrilege" (II, 251):

"This wickedness
(Might it retake true import well)
Means not default, nor vulgar vice,
Nor Adam's lapse in Paradise;
But worse: 'twas this evoked the hell--
Gave in the conscious soul's recess
Credence to Calvin. What's implied
In that deep utterance decried
Which Christians labially confess--
Be born anew?" (II, 252)

Ungar's "wickedness" is the sinister vein in the marble, it is the evil ingrained in the very soul of man.¹²

The passage poses a difficulty, however, which nothing else in the poem succeeds in explicating. Ungar is unwilling to equate this wickedness with original sin. The evil of which he speaks is not "default," not even "Adam's lapse in Paradise," but an evil which is warp and woof of man's nature. Man was created with a "sinister

¹²Earlier, Ungar, watching the mutilated outcasts who came to the Bethlehem manger had seen in their deformities a manifestation of man's wickedness:

Confirming so some angry sense
Of evil, and malevolence
In man toward man. (II, 212)

vein." For Ungar, only this view can explain the meaning of baptism which has as its function a new birth. The position of Ungar veers from the doctrine of orthodox Christianity which explains the fall of Adam as the source of the reprobate strain inherited by all of Adam's descendants. Thus, the doctrine of original sin does not impute man's evil to God Who created him, but to man's own act. Man, as he left the hand of God, was good, but through his free will he deliberately chose evil, thus producing that flaw which each man now inherits as part of his birthright. It is baptism which mends this flaw and causes man to be "born anew." Even the darker strain of Calvinism agrees that Adam was created in original innocence and that his "lapse", not the creative hand, is responsible for the consequent state of the world. But all that orthodox Christianity posits of original sin, Ungar, in this ambiguous passage at least, posits of a natural sinister vein with which man was created.¹³

Such a definition of man's wickedness implies a conclusion which Melville had explored in his earlier works: the responsibility for created evil must lie with the Creator. God's relation to evil had already occupied Melville in *Mardi*. As the voyagers discuss the omnipresence of God, Babbalanja cogently argues:

"Then, if that be absolutely so, Oro is not merely a universal onlooker, but occupies and fills all space; and no vacancy is left for any being, or anything but Oro. Hence, Oro is in all things, and himself is all things--the time-old creed. But since evil abounds, and Oro is all things, then he cannot be perfectly good; wherefore, Oro's

¹³This theory of man's innate depravity, of evil bred in the bone, is not far from that speech of ironic ambiguity which the negro cook of the *Pequod* delivers to the voracious sharks who are ripping apart the dead whale: "'You is sharks, sartin; but if you gobern de shark in you, why den you be angel; for all angel is not'ing more dan de shark well goberned'" (p. 294). In Ungar's terms, however, no matter how virtuous man may seemingly become, he can never lose the essential depravity of his nature; even the angelic man is nothing but a shark well governed, with all the shark's propensity for evil.

omnipresence and moral perfection seem incompatible."
(II, 124)

Babbalanja's arguments can be reduced, as Merrill Davis suggests, to the following devastating syllogism:

Oro is omnipresent
Evil is omnipresent
Oro is evil.¹⁴

In Mardi, at least the cataclysmic possibilities of Babbalanja's syllogism are never practically worked out; nor, on the other hand, is a satisfactory solution provided.¹⁵

The question, as it presents itself in Clarel, springs from different grounds, for here it is the delineation of an essentially reprobate human nature which brings the problem into focus. If man's depravity does not proceed from a deliberate choice of evil by free will but is inbuilt in his nature, then one is forced to conclude that man had a propensity for evil in his very creation. God has, then, created evil, and yet the philosophic definition of God as goodness would imply that this is a contradiction of the very nature of God as He is orthodoxly considered.

Were one to follow Ungar's argument to its logical conclusion, one would say that if man were created with a vein of evil, then it would be only an unjust god who would punish him for what was in a sense "natural" to him. What god would create a being innately evil and then penalize him for those acts which proceed from his nature? Ungar, himself, however, seems never to be aware of the damaging

¹⁴Davis, "Mardi": A Chartless Voyage, p. 179. Griffith points out the similarity between Babbalanja's line of argument and that of Melville's favorite, Pierre Bayle, in his article on Spinoza whose monism implies that if God be the only agent, then all evil must be ascribed to him. (Melville's Quest for God, p. 114, 157, 176).

¹⁵See also the episode of the Sinner-God in Mardi, II, 1. Also the impeccable gentleman in The Confidence-Man, a type of malign deity who sins by deputy (Ch. VII).

implications of his statement. All of his other utterances concerning God and man clearly indicate his belief in man's personally culpable acts. As we have already indicated at some length (Ch. IV, sec. 6), Ungar interprets the whole decline of his age as a natural consequence of that attitude which glorifies human nature and repudiates the divinity. In concluding his arguments, he avers that without God man is damned:

"Depart from us!"--And if He do?
 (And that He may, the Scripture says)
 Is aught betwixt ye and the hells?
 For He, nor in irreverent view,
 'Tis He distils that savour true
 Which keeps good essences from taint;
 Where He is not, corruption dwells,
 And man and chaos are without restraint." (II, 247)

While Ungar's explication of the word "wickedness" suggests ruinous conclusions concerning the God of creation, the premises of his argument are never practically operative. Although throughout the journey, the desolation of the land is often attributed to the hand of an avenging god, the implication is that of a god righteously angry with a sinful and unfaithful humanity. While the tone does not suggest a god of mercy, neither does it suggest a god of injustice.¹⁶

The second passage of outstanding importance for this problem, is spoken by Mortmain upon his return from his desert vigil. The lines are, however, so fraught with grammatical ambiguities that the meaning is never made clear. Mortmain gazing into the waters of the

¹⁶The topographical references with their allusions to Biblical events bear this out: the pilgrims pass by the gulf of Achor where the disobedient Achan met his death, on to the site of the Five Cities destroyed for their proverbial vices. Despite Margoth's attempt to explain the phenomenon of the disappearance of the damned cities in terms of scientific research, the overwhelming impression remains that this mysterious event is far beyond the reach of geologic explanation. Further emphasis on the point that man's misfortunes are but the visitations of a just God is provided by a narrative told by Rolfe (I, 148-149).

Dead Sea condemns the doomed city of Sodom, and then extends his condemnation not only to the obvious sinners who dabble in "carnal harlotry" but even more to those who practice "sins refined, crimes of the spirit" (I, 319). He continues his violent indictment especially of those who cover their wicked designs under the cloak of good:

"Tis thou who servest Mammon's hate
Or greed through forms which holy are--
Black slaver steering by a star
'Tis thou--and all like thee in state.
Who knew the world, yet varnished it;
Who traded on the coast of crime
Though landing not; who did outwit
Justice, his brother, and the time--
These, chiefly these, to doom submit. (I, 321)

This general indictment is followed by a long and intricate apostrophe in an obscure passage which must be quoted in full. Mortmain, still peering on the waves, begins:

"Be these the beads on the wives'-wine,
Tofana-brew?--O fair Medea--
O soft man-eater, furry fine;
Oh, be thou Jael, be thou Leah--
Unfathomably shallow!--No!
Nearer the core than man can go
Or science get--nearer the slime
Of Nature's rudiments and lime
In chyle before the bone. Thee, thee
In thee the filmy cell is spun--
The mould thou art of what men be:
Events are all in thee begun--
By thee, through thee!--undo, undo,
Prithce, undo, and still renew
The fall forever." (I, 320-321)¹⁷

The object of Mortmain's wild address is never made more explicit than this. William Braswell's facile assumption that the indictment is directed at God is supported by his preconceptions

¹⁷Braswell quotes the last few lines of this passage with the comment that here we have a "scientifically phrased indictment of God for the evil in human nature." (p. 119). Richard Chase maintains that Melville is addressing "absolute evil" symbolized by his own "Medea-like mother" (p. 253). Chase's explanation is hardly substantiated by the poem.

rather than the text or the larger pattern of Mortmain's thought. Perhaps the key to the passage lies in establishing an antecedent to "thee" which is repeated three times within a line and a half. In conjunction with the action which follows, it is possible to suggest "nature" as the antecedent. In this case, one can explicate further to suggest that evil lies in original nature, in the substance before it becomes part of man's body ("chyle before [antecedent to] the bone"). From this original nature ("the mould. . . of what men be") is spun the cell of man. This prime substance, then, is the cause of evil. Thus, going back to the first lines of the passage, we may presume that the poet means "No" to be taken as a negation of the lines preceding--"No" to the idea that the cause of evil may be ascribed to the women (Jael, Leah, Medea) as to an original cause. Such a suggestion is "unfathomably shallow." Not these, but the very substance of original nature must be held responsible.

The clue to the last three lines is indicated in the word, "prithee" which suggests not a denunciation but a petition to Nature, and perhaps obliquely to God. This petition to "undo" and "renew" involves both a negative and a positive action. To "undo" (the negative aspect) means to break the original mould; to "renew" (the positive) means to remake in the Pauline sense of "renew." Thus, the passage is a plea to cancel the inbuilt cause of evil and to correct the consequences of the fall.¹⁸

Such a conclusion is at best tenuous, but whatever Mortmain

¹⁸For the explication of this difficult passage, I am indebted to the suggestions made by Professor G. Giovannini.

intends to posit as the ultimate cause of suffering, it is quite clear from the whole body of his statements that the reprobate nature of man must be considered as an important element of the problem.¹⁹

This idea of man's natural depravity profoundly moves Clarel who, in reflecting upon the pessimism of Mortmain and Ungar, can find little possibility for man's salvation. Standing in the twilight of Bethlehem, he cannot throw off the oppressive sense of man's guilt:

But Clarel, who, since that one hour
Of unreserve on Saba's tower,
Less relished Derwent's pleasant walk
Of myrtles, hardly might remain
Uninfluenced by Ungar's vein:
If man in truth be what you say,
And such the prospects for the clay,
And outlook of the future--cease!
What's left us but the senses' sway?
Sinner, sin out life's petty lease:
We are not worth the saving. . . . (II, 252-253)

The general attitude expressed by Clarel veers toward the position that while God as creator may be responsible for human suffering, moral evil is to be imputed to the reprobate nature of man.

3. Suffering and Innocence: the Hand of God

The relation between God and suffering was a problem of long standing with Melville. In Pierre, the young hero addresses a question to Isabel which focuses the issue: "'Is love a harm? Can Truth betray to pain? Sweet Isabel, how can hurt come in the path to God?'" (p. 118). In Clarel, the premonitory lines which close the idyllic canto dealing with Ruth and Clarel's love echo the question which Pierre had placed earlier:

She could not think but all would prove
Subject in end to mighty love.

. of Christ.

¹⁹See especially the pages preceding the quoted passage, and also I, 185, 186, 191, 316-320.

Could Heaven two loyal hearts abuse?
The death-moth, let him keep his bower. (I, 153)

In both cases tragedy strikes the unsuspecting heroes. Although in the case of Pierre the motivation seems impure, in the case of Clarel the suffering seems to follow directly upon a virtuous act. While in Melville's earlier works, the problem is presented in the direct terms of the relation of divinity to human pain, it assumes a different and far more complex face in Clarel. Here the problem is explored largely in terms of the mystery of the suffering Christ and the symbolism of the Christian cross.

The initial approach to the question is made by Celio who, though a Roman Catholic by birth, is loath to accept the conventional Catholic values imposed upon the actions of the Man-God. Standing before the Ecce Homo Arch, Celio explores the meaning of Christ and His place in the Christian dispensation. The conclusions he reaches are far from the tenets of orthodox Christianity:

Yon Man it is this burden lays:
Even He who in the pastoral hours,
Abroad in fields, and cheered by flowers,
Announced a heaven's unclouded days;
And, ah, with such persuasive lips--
Those lips now sealed while doom delays--
Won men to look for solace there;
But, crying out in death's eclipse,
When rainbow none His eyes might see,
Enlarged the margin for despair--
My God, My God, forsakest Me?

.
But Thou--ah, see, in rack how pale
Who did the world with throes convulse;
Behold Him--yea--behold the Man
Who warranted if not began
The dream that drags out its repulse. (I, 52-53)

Celio's indictment may be viewed under two large aspects: Christ's betrayal of His followers, and God's betrayal of Christ. His first condemnation is for Christ Himself, who promised solace

to suffering mankind only to betray His promises.²⁰ Yet, suggests Celio, such betrayal was not entirely Christ's fault since He Himself was betrayed by that Father Whom He preached. Indeed, Christ was forced to admit His own failure as He died, crying "My God, My God, forsake Me?"

Later, Celio's accusation of Christ's betrayal is further implemented by Rolfe. Recalling the promises of paradisaal happiness made by various mythologies, Rolfe ponders how mankind has been so often betrayed by false promises. Can this indictment, he wonders, also be made of Christianity:

"Whence sprang the vision? They who freeze,
On earth here, under want or wrong;
The Sermon on the Mount shall these
Find verified? Is love so strong?
Or bounds are hers, that Python mars
Your gentler influence, ye stars?
If so, how seem they given o'er
To worse than Circe's fooling spell;
Enslaved, degraded, tractable
To each mean atheist a crafty power.
So winning in enthusiast plea
Here may the Gospel but the more
Operate like a perfidy?" (II, 12-13)

Yet despite these allusions to Christ as betrayer, most references emphasize Him only in His role as innocent victim.²¹ It is,

²⁰Baird's explanation of this treachery is interesting: "The promise of the Gospel and the promise of the Cross are irreconcilable, as absolutes, with the nature of a supreme God endlessly eluding the 'man-dreamed' revelation of the promises. . . Man before Christ was content with life's discontent; natural law prevailed; and after Christ the hope of an absolute knowledge of God as mercy and justice convulsed the world. . ." Ishmael, p. 262.

²¹The image of the lamb symbolizing Christ as innocent victim underscores the theme. It first appears in the canto describing Nathan's early farm life:

Lambs had he known by thunder killed,
Innocents--and the type of Christ
Betrayed. (I, 71)

At Bethlehem, the pilgrims gave upon a stone monument composed of three tablets: the Shepherd looking at his lost sheep; Christ's monogram crossed with the pastoral crook; the central plaque of a lamb passively permitting the shearer to take its fleece. The narrator comments:

The fleece rolled off in seamless shawl,
Flecked here and there with hinted blood.
It did not shrink; no cry did come;
In still life of that stone subdued
Shearer and shorn alike were dumb. (II, 194)

above all, his pain which is underscored, in both symbols of the lamb and of the cross. Cross imagery abounds in the poem. Besides those passages which we are specifically concerned with here, Nehemiah's ass is described as having the image of a cross upon his shoulders (I, 177); Agath bears the symbol of a crucifixion upon his arm (II, 163); Mortmain alone in the desert writes an inscription to the cross (I, 301-303).

In approaching this symbol, however, one must be careful not to impose upon it orthodox Christian values which are foreign to the mentality of the characters speaking. James Baird performs a valuable service in suggesting the many pre-Christian and extra-Christian values which may be signified by the use of the cross which is a cosmic symbol, transcending the scope of any single theological position. In discussing the primitive symbolism of the tree and the cross, he points to an illuminating passage in Suzanne Langer's Philosophy in a New Key, in which she classified the cross as a "charged symbol." Such a symbol has many symbolic functions "intergrated into a complex so that they are all apt to be sympathetically invoked with any chosen one." In suggesting the meanings involved in the use of the cross as symbol, she explains:

"... the actual instrument of Christ's death, hence a symbol of suffering; first laid on his shoulders, an actual burden, as well as an actual product of human handiwork, and on both grounds a symbol of his accepted moral burden; also an ancient symbol of the four zodiac points, with a cosmic connotation; a "natural" symbol of cross-roads. . . and therefore of decision, crisis, choice; also and finally, to the artistic eye a cross is a figure of a man. All these and many other meanings lie dormant in the simple, familiar, significant shape.²²

Professor Baird, however, in applying this theory of cross

²²Suzanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (Cambridge, 1942), pp. 284-285, quoted in Baird, Ishmael, p. 301.

symbolism to Melville tends to limit its meaning unduly. He insists upon Melville's use of the "primitive pre-Christian cross" in the sections dealing with Agar and Nehemiah's ass. It is difficult to understand what in the poem leads Baird to this viewpoint. One would not deny that the symbol includes suggestions of "decision, crisis, choice," as he rightly suggests, but since in each case Christ is specifically mentioned and always in connection with His suffering, it seems unwarranted to maintain that we are dealing here with a solely pre-Christian cross.²³

Mortmain, in particular, is irresistibly drawn to the suffering endured by Christ, especially to the mental anguish caused during His passion by the gibes and taunts of the mob. We must be careful here not to impute an attitude of Christian orthodoxy to Mortmain's attraction for the suffering Christ. Mortmain never admits the literal meaning of the redemptive act. For him, Christ remains only an impotent sufferer. He is a "bleeding man"--to use Ungar's phrase (II, 245)--whose human life ended in failure both for Himself and His followers. Shortly before his revelation at the mystic palm Mortmain cries:

"Cling to His tree, and there find hope;
 Me it but makes a misanthrope.
 Makes? nay, but 'twould, did not the hate
 Dissolve in pity of the fate.--(II, 135)²⁴

Ungar, also, assumes this posture as, gazing on the stone triptych of the lamb and shepherd which the pilgrims see at Bethlehem, he comments:

²³Baird, Ishmael, pp. 311, 313.

²⁴Bezanson, in commenting on the meaning of the cross in Clarel writes: ". . . whether the world is of nature of supernature, the Cross is the one unmistakable reality. The Cross as a tragic symbol dominates the imagination of the four monomaniacs, Celio, Agath, Mortmain, and Ungar. . . . Each of these pilgrims is beyond the church, and for all of them the cross is a symbol of pain, not hope" Clarel, p. 158.

"This type's assigned,
 To One who, sharing not man's mind
 Partook man's frame: whose mystic birth
 Wrecked him upon this reef of earth
 Inclement and inhuman. Yet,
 Through all the trials that beset
 He leaned on an upholding arm--
 Foreknowing, too, reserves of balm.
 But how of them whose souls may claim
 Some link with Christ beyond the name,
 Which share the fate, but never share
 Aid of assurance, and nowhere
 Look for requital? Such there be:
 In by-lanes o'er the world, ye see
 The Calvary-faces." (II, 195)²⁵

Ungar's phrase, "the Calvary-faces," recalls the question posed earlier by Mortmain who, after describing the suffering of Christ's passion, asks:

"This day, with some of earthly race,
 May passion similar go on?" (I, 185)

To this query, only an affirmative answer is possible for characters such as Mortmain, Ungar, Celio, and Agath, to whom pain has become the one overwhelming reality of human experience. Christ and His cross provide no solution to this mystery of pain, since the crucifixion remains at best a symbol of suffering heroically endured.²⁶

²⁵This passage contains apparent theologic contradictions. The first few lines indicate that Christ is more than mere man, or, at least, that He has special claim on some supernatural power; yet this aid, this "upholding arm," upon which He may lean at will, is of no use in mitigating human suffering or in enabling man to rise victorious over it. Mankind, although linked to Christ's suffering, has no share in His alleviations.

²⁶William Braswell, although agreeing that in Clarel Christ is indicted on many points, emphasizes the importance which He retained for Melville's life: "Among old and new charges leveled at Christ in Clarel are that he made mankind discontented in this world by telling of another world; his teaching does not agree with what one learns in this life; worship of Christ has led to much strife; his parables are not clear, leaving many in doubt as to what he meant; and he does not comfort those who need him.

"Yet Christ's doctrine of love and His promise of immortality were among the lasting influences of Melville's life." Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought, p. 121.

Walter Bezanson in commenting on Ungar's attitude toward the cross symbol provides a penetrating insight on the problem:

Yet although Ungar acknowledges Christ's greatness. . . he sees in the life of Christ only greater reason for despair. . . If Christ had supernatural power, then his experience is but mockery of Ungar's, for that power is ineffective to-day. If he did not have supernatural power, then Christ's cross is symbolical confirmation of the tragedy of all life at all time. In either case, there is no divine hope. Ungar denies the central truth in supernatural Christianity. . . Through his own suffering Ungar has come to understand the full naturalistic meaning of the cross.²⁷

This consistent attitude of regarding Christ as innocent victim, clarifies the general problem of the relationship of suffering to evil. If Christ, even though supremely innocent, suffered, then suffering does not have its exclusive source in man's sinful nature, nor is it always to be regarded as a punishment for sin. Pain strikes the innocent as well as the guilty, and may cause the former even more suffering because of the sensitivity of his nature. This solution had been suggested toward the beginning of Clarel in the canto, "Huts" (I, 100-102), in which Clarel and Nehemiah visit the lepers dwelling beyond the gates of Jerusalem. Looking upon these wretched sufferers, the narrator addresses the reader:

Behold, proud worm (if such can be)
What yet may come, yea, even to thee.
Who knoweth? canst forecast the fate
In infinite ages? Probe thy state:
Sinless art thou? Then these sinned not.
These, these are men: and thou art--what? (I, 103)

The physical stigma incurred by the lepers is no sign of moral decay. They may be as spiritually clean as those whose bodies are whole. This passage, then, underscores the idea that suffering strikes where it wills and has no substantial connection with the moral state of its victim.

The last and most complex facet of the relation between suffering and guilt is presented following Mortmain's grim declamation at the shore of the Dead Sea. The problem of evil has become Mortmain's single preoccupation, and his invectives have led far beyond the surface of the evil act into the dark labyrinths of man's heart with its terrible propensities for wickedness. As the pilgrims drift away, ill at ease before his exposition of the "sinister vein," there occurs a peculiar passage placed in the mouth of "two spirits, hovering in remove!" (I, 321).²⁸ The problem which they ponder is how a sinless man could know so much of sin, how the innocent can suffer the pains of the damned:

"Ah, Zoima, say;
Be it far from me to impute a sin,
But may a sinless nature win
Those deeps he knows?"--Sin shuns that way;
Sin acts the sin, but flees the thought
That sweeps the abyss that sin has wrought.
Innocent be the heart and true--
Howe'er it feed on bitter bread--
That venturous through the Evil led,
Moves as along the Ocean's bed
Amid the dragon's staring crew." (I, 321)

Mortmain is hereby exonerated from all personal guilt. He, and, by implication, Ungar are placed in the company of the "bleeding man"; they are among the "Calvary-faces" of which Ungar had spoken earlier. They suffer though innocent, and what they suffer is far beyond physical pain; it is the suffering consequent upon an understanding of the ravages of sin. Like the author of the Pauline text to which Melville refers, they are permitted to enter into the "mystery of iniquity" (I, 316). This last passage gives expository utterance to the implication noted throughout that the innocent of heart may often

²⁸No explanation or preparation is given for these "two spirits." Aside from the fact that one is addressed as "Zoima" there is no clue to their identity.

feed upon bitter bread.

4. The Value of Suffering

Implicit in the attitudes explored in Chapters I and II has been the endorsement of the positive value of suffering. It is suffering which, positively accepted, sensitizes the soul to a need for truth and strengthens it to endure the hardships of the quest.²⁹ In this section we will be concerned with three possible postures in the face of suffering: recoil, static endurance, and dynamic acceptance.

Vine is the most intuitive and sensitive of the pilgrims.³⁰ The suffering he endures proceeds directly from his own deep nature rather than from any specific tragedy. He is not burdened with failure as Mortmain, nor with physical deformity as Celio; Vine's pain consists in facing a cosmic vision of suffering for which he can find no explanation. His was a mind which had long fed upon the dark mysteries of human suffering, as his attitude at Nehemiah's death indicates.

It is he who discovers the body of the "innocent and sinless" (I, 328), and his reaction sets him apart from the other pilgrims who are "staggered" at the unexpected sight:

The start which the discoverer gave
Was physical--scarce shocked the soul,
Since many a prior revery grave
Forearmed against alarm's control.
To him, indeed, each lapse and end,
Meet--in harmonious method blend.
Lowly he murmured, "Here is balm:
Sleep upon sleep; it is the calm
And incantation of the close." (I, 328)

Vine, however, although so sensitive to suffering and so steeped

²⁹See especially Ch. II, sec. 5 and 6.

³⁰See Ch. I, sec. 3; Ch. II, sec. 5.

in reflections about it, is unable to assume a positive attitude toward it. As we have already suggested (Ch. II, sec. 5), his very sensitivity leads to a basic flaw in his character. His temperament, unlike Celio's, has not the tough resilience to fight through the problem, and, instead, he huddles beneath it almost undone. This is the significance of the scene already quoted which Clarel comes upon unwittingly on the banks of the Jordan:

'Twas Vine. He wore that nameless look
About the mouth--so hard to brook.--(II, 33)

Faced with a prospect of further suffering, he shrinks from the burden.³¹ It is this recoil which sets him apart from Mortmain, for whom, even more than for Celio, pain comes to take on a positive value.

The second basic attitude toward pain is that of the stoic endurance of the old Greek sailor, Agath. Agath is defined in terms of misfortune. The narrative of his experiences reads like a series of exempla illustrating the virtue of endurance. Agath does not recoil from suffering but stands passively before it. This passivity gives him an adamant quality against which fate strikes in vain. His wrinkled, weather-beaten face with its "work-day, passive" look is symbol of his inner character which had been "school by the in-human sea" (II, 206).

Despite the commendation given to Agath's powers of endurance, his basic attitude leaves much to be desired. Although he is able to face the tragic fact of human life without cringing, he is unable to provide any explanation of the suffering which he stoically accepts as his lot.³² Following his description of the desert island, symbol

³¹See Clarel, I, 287. This episode has already been discussed at some length in Ch. II, sec. 5.

³²See Ch. II, sec. 4.

of sterility and isolation, the narrator comments:

He ended, and how passive sate:
Nature's own look, which might recall
Dumb patience of mere animal,
Which better may abide life's fate
Than comprehend. (II, 172)³³

This element of passive resignation to suffering is also noted by Vine who feels a certain kinship with the old sailor:

Authentic; man of nature true,
If simple; naught that slid between
Him and the elemental scene--
Unless it were that thing indeed
Uplooming from his ancient creed;
Yet that but deepen might the sense
Of awe, and serve dumb reverence
And resignation-- (II, 167)

As the pilgrims leave Mar Saba, Derwent notices upon Agath's arm "a crucifixion tattoo" (II, 162). But when he is asked about it, he seems unable to provide an explanation of its significance. He tells them only that it was marked upon him years ago by a fellow sailor, adding:

". . . . Little I thought
Which meant this thing which here ye see,
The bleeding man upon the tree;
Since then I've felt it, and the fates." (II, 163)

With him, personal tragedy leads to nothing further. He neither enlarges it into cosmic significance nor questions its source or its justice. Such an attitude, while superior to the recoil of Vine, does not admit that positive value of suffering in which both Celio and Mortmain believe.

³³Elizabeth Foster in discussing the attitude toward suffering exemplified by Benito Cereno and the Chola widow of the Encantadas, mentions a point which we may also apply to Agath: ". . . Melville now found the tragic hero to be, not the great man flexing mighty muscles, but the mere human being, and the universal tragedy to be what happens to the least of these." This change of attitude, she suggests, is no sign of Melville's decline but of the growth of an "immense compassion." The Confidence-Man, p. xc.

The proximate source of Celio's pain is his physical deformity which provides a symbol for his interior suffering.³⁴ His misshapen body is the germ from which all his other misfortunes rise: the failure of his ambitions, the pity of his family, his betrayal in love.³⁵ Celio's answer to this is to grope for another world which will not fail him as the one of his childhood has done. Suffering has, in a sense, freed him for the quest of truth, but once in the Holy Land in which he had placed so much hope, he is faced again with the same basic problem. Jerusalem, instead of providing an answer, only emphasizes the mystery of pain. Here he is brought face to face with the scene of Christ's passion, and stands hopelessly before a suffering whose very innocence makes it inscrutable.³⁶ Celio, like Mortmain, makes no effort to evade either the large mystery of suffering or his own personal tragedy. There is no stoic acceptance in Celio, who fights step by step toward a solution; it is not the pain which he fights, however, as much as the enigma of its significance. The positive value which Celio's attitude suggests, but which is left incomplete at his death, is fully delineated in Mortmain.

Mortmain's initial tragedy was his disillusionment with mankind. Through this suffering he became aware of his need for clear truth, the need to dive into deep waters where wisdom dwells. Suffering is at once the motivation and the means by which he seeks truth.³⁷ The

³⁴It is actually a physical suffering which has caused his warp of spirit:

. . . . Tied up in knot
Of body by the fleshly withes,
Needs must it be the spirit writhes
And takes a warp. (I, 47)

³⁵Clarel, I, 46-50.

³⁶See the preceding section.

³⁷See Ch. I, sec. 3

Swede plunges through the sandy wastes of the desert seeking the answer to that pain which he accepted as part of man's inevitable lot. More and more he comes to live in a world of unmitigated suffering. He has made himself so sensitive to pain that fresh experiences are like "gusts of lonely pain beating upon the naked brain" (I, 237). His own personal tragedy has widened until the suffering of all mankind has, in a way, become his personal tragedy. This accounts for his bitter denunciation of sin and his plea to free mankind from its curse--passages which have been discussed at some length in sections 2 and 3 of this chapter.

The important element which emerges from Mortmain's attitude is the direct sensitizing value of pain. His soul, made sensitive by suffering, is made sensitive not only to suffering but also to other spiritual values. It is directly stated that his capacity for the values offered by Mar Saba's palm is proportionate to the sensitivity produced by his lonely vigils and wanderings. This passage has already been quoted (Ch. II, sec. 6) but its importance justified reproducing it here:

His fibres made so fine in end
That though in trials fate can lend
Firm to withstand, strong to contend;
Sensitive he to a spirit's touch. (II, 137)

While Vine recoils from pain, and Agath stoically accepts it, unaware of its value, Mortmain immerses himself in it in his attempt to find an answer. Such a course destroys him; his mind steeped in pain vitiates his body. Mortmain dies, but not before he has found his answer.

The imagery of exquisite peace which surrounds Mortmain's final act is in dramatic contrast to the frenzied acts which preceded it and enforce the conclusion that pain has a positive value:

A wind awakened him--a breath
 He lay like light upon the heath,
 Alive though still. And all came back,
 The years outlived, with all their black;
 While bright he saw the angel-tree
 Across the gulf alluring sway:
 Come over! be-forever be
As in the trance.-- "Wilt no delay?
 Yet hear me in appeal to thee:
 When the last light shall fade from me,
 If, groping round, no hand I meet;
 Thee I'll recall--invoke thee, Palm:
 Comfort me thee, thou Paraclete!
 The lull late mind beneath thy lee,
 Then, then, renew, and seal the calm." (II, 138)

This passage seems to provide a direct response to the question which Clarel had placed directly after Nehemiah's death:

There shall the Tree whereon He hung,
 The olive wood, leaf out again--
 Again leaf out, and endless reign
 Type of the peace that buds from sinless pain?
 (II, 3)

5. The Position of the Hero

The suffering which Clarel endures during the course of the pilgrimage is spiritual rather than physical in nature. It is composed of three major elements: fear, loneliness, and religious skepticism, all of which are made operative through the tragic and mysterious fact of death.³⁸

Death touches Clarel closely five times during the pilgrimage, and in each instance it is the loneliness and uncertainty of this

³⁸A letter to Samuel Shaw written in December of 1862, provides evidence that the fear of death shown by the majority of the characters in Clarel was an expression of Melville's basic attitude. Although the passage has a certain levity, its undertone of deep feeling is clear:

"I once, like other spoonies, cherished a loose sort of notion that I did not care to live very long. But I will frankly own that I have now no serious, no insuperable objections to a respectable longevity. I don't like the idea of being left out night after night in a cold churchyard."

Quoted in Thorpe, p. 402.

last act of man which are underscored.³⁹ The isolating power of death with its consequent loneliness is first felt by Clarel following the sudden death of Celio. The young Italian's offer of friendship, which Clarel had failed to accept, is withdrawn by death, leaving the hero a prey to a greater loneliness than before. This pain is endowed with a positive value, however. Clarel, in looking through the few belongings which Celio had left, finds a journal in which he finds inscribed many of his own dark thoughts. These jottings of the dead man give the young students courage to face boldly questions which he had formerly evaded. Thinking of Celio's death, he ponders:

But lo, arrested in event--
Hurried down Hades' steep descent;
Cut off while in progressive stage
Perchance, ere years might more unfold:
Who young dies, leaves life's tale half told.
How then? Is death the book's fly-page?
Is no hereafter? If there be,
Death foots what record? how forestalls
Acquittance in eternity? (I, 85)

Just as Mortmain's personal suffering had led him on his quest for truth, so Celio's death, bringing to the fore the problem of life's essential meaning, drives Clarel deeper in his search.

The murder of Nathan by the marauding Arabs produces similar effects. Consequent upon her father's death, Ruth and Clarel are separated according to Jewish rubric; it is, however, this separation which is indirectly responsible for Clarel's decision to join the pilgrimage through the Holy Land which symbolizes the quest for truth.

More important than the two preceding episodes is the mystic death of Nehemiah at the bank of the Dead Sea. It is the old man's

³⁹Death comes to Celio, Nathan, Nehemiah, Mortmain, Ruth and Agar.

pathetic yet victorious death which brings to the fore certain primal questions concerning religious faith: what is death? is it the last act of man? is there only emptiness following it? is there a future life? is it actually a time of happiness? Throughout the canto dealing with these events (I, 327-332) Clarel remains regrettably silent. Beyond avowing his friendship for Nehemiah and asking the single question, "'Ah, whither gone?'" (I, 329), he says nothing, leaving to the more vocal pilgrims the opportunity of introducing the doubts which they all share.

It is Rolfe who, recalling the burial practices and beliefs of the ancients, voices the essential query:

"How fare we now? But were it clear
In nature or in lore devout
That parted souls live on in cheer,
Gladness would be--shut pathos out.
His poor thin life: the end? no more?
The end here by the Dead Sea Shore?" (I, 329)⁴⁰

Although Clarel makes no immediate response to Rolfe's question, it becomes clear in a later canto, "Vault and Grotto" (II, 117-120), that he has been deeply affected by the latter's skepticism concerning a future existence. As he visits the burial house at Mar Saba, he becomes immersed in the thought of those innumerable spirits of whose final destiny he knows so little. His fears are expressed in a short soliloquy which is an echo of Rolfe's former query:

Die--to die!
To be, then not to be: to end,
And yet time never, never suspend
His going. (II, 119)

While Rolfe's avowal of skepticism following Nehemiah's death is

⁴⁰The question here expressed by Rolfe had been put earlier by Celio as in the dark of the night he followed the funeral cortege out beyond the walls of Jerusalem and listened in skepticism to the prayers of the mourners. Their triumphant cry, "'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'" is for Celio and unresolved query, as he ponders that Christ Himself, whose power they are invoking, shared man's common fate. See Clarel, I, 58.

not satisfactorily answered by any of the pilgrims, it is solved in terms of the imagery with which the canto ends. As the aged Evangelist's body is interred, the pilgrims are startled by a "rush, a roar" (I, 331) and turning they see an avalanche of stone tumbling from the mountain onto the shore below. In the ensuing silence they keep their eyes fixed upwards and soon behold in the sky a rainbow:

Thus They turn; and, in that silence sealed,
 What works there from behind the veil?
 A counter-object is revealed--
 A thing of heaven and yet how frail:
 of Up in thin mist above the sea
 a Humid is formed, and noiselessly,
 isolated The fog-bow: segment of an oval
 the Set in a colourless removal
 thought Against a vertical shaft, or slight
 the Slim pencil of an aqueous light.
 Suspended there, the segment hung
 Like to the May-wreath that is swung
 Against the polt. It showed half-spent--
 Hovered and trembled, paled away, and--went.
 (I, 331-332)

God's answer to Nehemiah's death and to the disturbed questions of the pilgrims is the rainbow--symbol from primitive biblical times of His covenant with His people, and consequently a sign of His fidelity.

The following canto, "In the Mountain" (II, 3-8), continues the questions of doubt and faith, brought to the fore by the fact of death with which they have all been so closely associated. The queries concerning immortality are repeated: do "tried and ransomed natures" go to heaven; is there "peace after strife"; do the seraphim shed balm "on all of earnest mind"? (II, 3). The passage ends on a question and yet if one keeps this section in context, reading it with the rainbow imagery of the preceding canto still in mind, it would seem that without undue extension of the symbol, a positive solution for these unanswered queries can be reached.

Mortmain's death beneath the mystic palm at the monastery of Mar

For the imagery surrounding Mortmain's death see sec. 4 of this chapter.

Saba, reaffirms this positive position.⁴¹ In a preceding canto (II, 135-318), Mortmain had to some degree prepared us for the final denouement. As he explores the meaning which death has for him, he speaks with a tranquillity far from his usual restless violence:

"Despair? nay, death; and what's death's cheer?
Death means--the sea-beat gains the shore;
He's home; his watch is called no more."

Thus these lines reinforce the profound peace of his actual death.

The conclusion which emerges from a consideration of the deaths of Celio, Nehemiah, and Mortmain is that, although death in itself is a frightening and baffling thing, an act which imposes an inevitable isolation, it has in common with all suffering the power to direct the minds of men away from superficialities toward primal values. Although there are no explicit solutions to the queries raised by death, the implications of the total context suggest that death is not the end but, in Mortmain's words, the sailor's final return: "'He's home; his watch is called no more.'"

All of these values must be borne in mind in approaching the climactic episode of the death of Ruth (II, 282-286). Clarel, returning at night to the city of Jerusalem, fully determined to take Ruth for his bride, meets a funeral cortege at the edge of the city which he soon learns is carrying the bodies of Ruth and Agar. A foreshadowing of this tragic event had been given early in the poem. Shortly after Clarel had made his decision to go on the pilgrimage, leaving Ruth in Jerusalem, he meets a funeral procession (I, 165-166). It is in its description ironically similar to a wedding procession:

Young voices; a procession shows:
A litter rich, with flowery wreath,
Singers and censers, and a veil.

⁴¹For the imagery surrounding Mortmain's death see sec. 4 of this chapter.

She comes, the bride; but, ah, how pale:
 Her groom that Blue-Beard, cruel Death,
 Wedding his millionth maid today;
 She, stretched on that Armenian bier,
 Leaves home and each familiar way--
 Quits all for him. (I, 165)

Clarel is unnerved by the sight and almost revokes his decision to be a member of the pilgrimage. The canto is frequently alluded to in the following sections of the poem and thus prepare us for Ruth's funeral.⁴²

The canto in which this event takes place is significantly titled, "The Valley of Decision" (II, 282-286). The imagery which surround the actual burial is terrifying and macabre. Melville here employs the full paraphernalia of the Gothic novel tradition: the dark night, the sleeping city, the gleaming lanterns, the shrouded grave diggers, and, in the midst of all this, the stark figures of Clarel's betrothed and her mother.

Close they draw--
 Advancing, lit by fan-shaped rays
 Shot from a small dark-lantern's jaw
 Presented pistol-like. They saw
 Mattocks and men, in outline dim,
 On either ominous side of him.
 From whom went forth that point of blaze.
 Resting from labor, each one stays
 His implement on gravestones old.
 New dug, between these, they behold
 Two narrow pits: and (nor remote)
 Two figures on the ground they note,
 Folded in cloaks. (II, 283-284)

For Clarel, the tragedy brings to the surface all the doubts which he had temporarily assuaged. In his wild ravings, he repudiates not only the consolations offered by faith, but even the existence of God Himself:

"O blind, blind, barren universe!
 Now am I like a bough torn down,
 And I must wither, cloud or sun!--

⁴²For allusions to the Armenian bier, see Clarel, I, 239, 297; II, 119.

Had I been near, this had not been. *the a life after*
Do spirits look down upon this scene?--

. *which, ultimate*

And here's the furl
Of Nathan's faith: then perish faith-- *one addressed*
'Tis perjured!--Take me, take me, Death!
Where Ruth is gone, me thither whirl, *take her with*
Where'er it be!" (II, 285)

Whatever his previous encounters with death had done to suggest a positive solution, the death of Ruth undoes. As far as the position of the hero is concerned, the canto ends on a note of complete skepticism.

Once again, however, as in the death of Nehemiah, the imagery which immediately follows suggests an answer far other than the dialogue of the characters. The canto which succeeds the burial scene (II, 287) is but nineteen lines long and is lyric rather than narrative in tone; these two qualities distinguish it from the rest of the poem. The voice is that of the narrator and the addressee is death. Because of its importance it is here quoted in full:

Stay, Death. Not mine the Christus-wand
Wherewith to charge thee and command:
I plead. Most gently hold the hand
Of her thou ledest far away;
Fear thou to let her naked feet
Treat ashes--but let mosses sweet
Her footing tempt, where'er ye stray.
Shun Orcus; win the moonlit land
Belulled--the silent meadows lone,
Where never any leaf is blown
From lily-stem in Azrael's hand.
There, till her love rejoin her lowly
(Pensive, a shade, but all her own),
On honey feed her, wild and holy;
Or trance her with thy choicest charm.
And if, ere yet the lover's free,
Some added dusk thy rule decree--
That shadow only let it be
Thrown in the moon-glade by the palm. (II, 287)

The tone of this short lyric is in complete contrast to the preceding canto. The first two lines accept the position of Christ as lord of life and death ("Not mine the Christus-wand wherewith to

charge thee and command") and the images which describe a life after death (a presumed fact) suggest the Elysian Fields in which, ultimately, the lover will be united to his beloved. The petitions addressed to Death itself ("On honey feed her, wild and holy; or trance her with thy choicest charm") are far from the danse macabre tradition, suggesting instead a gentle spirit of sighs and shadows.

At this point it is of extreme importance to distinguish between the values endorsed by the narrative voice and the posture of the hero. This canto must be understood as an interpolation by the narrator. The values it affirms are not adopted by Clarel who continues his lonely, estranged, and grief-stricken wanderings through the city. Even in the succeeding cantos Clarel finds no alleviation from his pain, and the last glimpse we have of the hero he is vanishing into the "obscurer town" (II, 296), still brooding beneath his tragic blow.

In the Epilogue the values indicated in the canto quoted above are repeated. Once again, the firm optimism of the narrative voice organizes the elements of sorrow, despair and hope into a meaningful pattern. The position of the hero must not be equated with the total meaning but must assume its rightful place as a segment of a larger whole. This point, however, will be discussed at greater length in the Conclusion. Here it is sufficient to distinguish between the whole and its parts and to provide a line of thought which will prepare for a discussion of the frequently disputed lines of the Epilogue.

A consideration of the theme of suffering and evil in Clarel indicates that as in his previous works, Melville, despite the contemporary climate, adhered firmly to the belief in the existence of both moral and physical evil. In exploring the sources of this

suffering, however, the older Melville places the emphasis more upon man than on God. The problem of a malign deity does not seem to be seriously considered here. The preoccupation with the place of Christ in the problem of suffering is another element not seen in the earlier works and which looks forward to the Christ imagery of Billy Budd. Innocent suffering is not futile but prepared for a redemption and revelation. Mortmain understands this, and although Clarel does not as yet, the narrative voice suggests that in time the suffering of the hero will bear its rightful fruit.

Clarel is noticeably silent. See the controversy with the Dominican friar (I, 271-283), the episode of Melchior (I, 327-339), the episode of the mystic palm (I, 135-141), the long controversy with Unger (II, 543-

ASCETICISM AND THE NATURAL LIFE

The catnip and the amaranth!--man's earthly household peace, and the ever-increasing appetite for God. (Pierre, p. 405)

As Pierre attempts to come to a final resolution concerning his obligations to Isabel, all the minor issues of his conflicting claims are subsumed in the inclusive query, "Lucy or God?" (p. 213). This query is implicitly reiterated in Clarel where it takes on the proportions of an organizing theme.

This theme may not, at first, seem to assume a major role in the poem. It is true that in examining the long debates with which Clarel is filled, one finds few explicit references to asceticism and the natural life as such. Expository utterance, however, although it consumes a large share of the poem, is not the exclusive vehicle for the expression of meaning. That this theme is major in evaluating the total meaning of Clarel becomes immediately evident when one focuses on elements other than the interminable debates: on the imagery used to delineate certain minor characters, the effect produced by various dramatic scenes, and, most of all, the terms of Clarel's persistent conflict. And here it is essential to note that it is under the formality of this theme that Clarel himself is brought into full relief. In considering the themes analyzed in the preceding chapters, it has been obvious that the frequent ambiguity in the presentation of certain values has been due to the shadowy or ambivalent posture of the hero. Clarel has often been no more than a sounding board against which the other characters play their opinions.¹ Asceticism and the natural life is, however, the hero's

¹In certain key arguments Clarel is noticeably silent. See especially the controversy with the Dominican friar (I, 271-283), the death of Nehemiah (I, 327-332), the episode of the mystic palm (II, 126-128, 135-141), the long controversy with Ungar (II, 242-250).

own theme, which runs like a leit-motif throughout the poem, and which, at the end, forces Clarel to a positive election.

We shall approach this theme under the following aspects: a statement of the terms, the meaning of the natural life, the value of asceticism, the forces in conflict.

1. A Statement of the Terms

The best single focus for the meaning of the natural life is Ruth. Clarel's love for Ruth is symbolic of all human love, but this human love is, in turn, further generalized to even more far-reaching proportions. It becomes the symbol of all earthly comfort, of "household peace," of a life without struggle, of natural joy.² In short, it becomes a symbol of a natural life in which conflict is reduced to a minimum and in which man accepts earthly happiness and, finding it satisfying, does not look for anything further.

Such a love rises above a purely carnal desire, but it is not concerned with any profound spiritual values. It pushes aside the problems of eternal verities and settles down to enjoy its own temporal fruits.

Various gradations of this natural attitude are represented by the pilgrims: the Greeks, the Lyonese, the Lesbian exemplify the most sensual level; Agar is symbolic of maternal love; Ruth becomes the culminating symbol of the highest human love.

Opposed to the value of the natural life stands the element

²The expression "household peace" occurs in *Pierre* (p. 405). Here the conflict between asceticism and the natural life is subsumed in the symbols of the catnip ("a mortal household herb") and the amaranth ("the immortal" flower). The narrator sums it up thus: "The catnip and the amaranth!--man's earthly household peace, and the ever-encroaching appetite for God" (p. 405). This statement has been used as the epigraph of this chapter.

which we may, for the sake of classification, call asceticism. This force is concerned with the mystery that lies beyond, with the deep things of man's soul, with the problems of faith, evil, suffering, truth. In its most extreme form, it may be called divine love, thus establishing an opposing polarity to human love.

Here, too, we find gradations of attitude manifested by the various characters: the haggard Syrian monk of the Quarantania suggests the struggle of asceticism; the Celebate of Mar Saba exemplifies the peace which may be achieved even within the struggle; the Franciscan Salvaterra evinces that perfect joy which is the fruit of total dedication. In equivocal positions are Vine and Celio, while Mortmain subsumes in his journey all the elements of struggle, peace, and final joy. Cyril and Habbibbi, inmates of Mar Saba, represent a fanatic asceticism which is manifestly condemned.

Recalling the themes which we have already considered, we should not be surprised to find an equation established between divine love and a rigid asceticism. According to the pattern already delineated, such asceticism is essential if man is to establish a personal relationship with spiritual values. First of all, we have seen in Chapters I and II that the quest for truth demands a rigorous self-discipline. One must be freed from all impediments, from all preconceptions, and even from human relationships which may obstruct.³ The Greeks, symbols of a life of ease, are unequal to the hardships of the journey and are forced to relinquish the pilgrimage. It is Mortmain, the loneliest and most austere of the pilgrims, who achieves most fully the object of his quest.

Over and above this essential austerity demanded by the quest itself, the theme of suffering and evil, with its lengthy explora-

³See especially Chapter I, section 2 and Ch. II, sec. 6.

tion of man's sinfulness (Ch. V, sec. 2), suggested a further motivation for an ascetic life. The eradication of sin demands a certain self-inflicted discipline. This indicates the motivation for Mortmain's austere life; he is a man "under ban of strange repentance" (I, 191). While man can never wholly eradicate the evil blot in his nature, he may, at least, perform penitential acts which will to some degree purify his soul and make it possible for him to achieve the object of his desire. It is this motive of Christian penance which propels most of the asceticism described in Clarel. The monastery of Mar Saba provides the topological symbol for this.

Despite Melville's preoccupation with synthesis, there is no evidence in Clarel of any attempt to bring the two forces of asceticism and the natural life into harmonious balance. Throughout the poem they are seen as two opposing elements, mutually exclusive and in essential conflict. They play out their conflict in the hero's mind, until at the end Clarel in his final symbolic dream is forced to choose between the figures of Salvaterra (symbol of asceticism) and the Lyonese (symbol of the natural life).

2. The Natural Life

The base sensualism of the natural life which is represented by such characters as the Lesbian and the Greeks does little to explicate the complex issues involved in Melville's theme. The gross imagery by which they are delineated is in itself a condemnation.⁴ As the Cavalcade leaves Jerusalem and begins its rocky defile, the narrator describes the "banker of the rich Levant" (I, 174) in terms of unrelieved sensuality:

⁴For a discussion of how the sensuality of the Greeks impinges on their quest for truth, see Ch. I, sec. 3.

A hale one followed, good to see,
 English and Greek in pedigree;
 Of middle-age; a ripe gallant,
 A banker of the rich Levant;
 In florid opulence preserved
 Like peach in syrup. Ne'er he swerved
 From morning bath, and dinner boon
 And velvet nap in afternoon,
 And lounge in garden with cigar.
 His home was Thessalonica,
 Which views Olympus. But, may be,
 Little he weened of Jove and gods
 In synod mid those brave abodes;
 Nor, haply, read or weighed Paul's plea
 Addressed from Athens o'er the sea
 Unto the Thessalonians old:
 His bonds he scanned, and weighed his gold. (I, 174)

With his gay "Parisian" garb, expensive cigarettes, and "rich Angora rug" (I, 174), it is obvious that "this wight did Lady Fortune love" (I, 175). But it is precisely his excessive good fortune which makes him indifferent to the higher values of the pilgrimage.

The Lesbian follows this same pattern. He does not join the pilgrimage until it arrives at Mar Saba. Surrounded by the austere pattern of life in the Greek monastery, his own Epicurean pattern stands out in notable relief:

Not broken he with fast and prayer:
 The leg did well plump out the sock;
 Nor young, nor old, but did enlock
 In reconciliation a bright cheek
 And fleecy beard; that cheek, in show,
 Arbutus flaked about with snow,
 Running-arbutus in spring's freak
 Overtaken so. In Mytilene,
 Sappho and Phaon's Lesbos green,
 His home was, his lax paradise,
 And island yet luxurious seen,
 Fruitful in all that can entice. (II, 49-50)

His own song, "'Sherbet today, to-morrow wine--'" is sufficient explication of the values which he holds dear. Properly speaking, however, neither the Greek banker nor the Lesbian merchant are involved in the quest for truth. Although for a time they accompany the pilgrims, their consistent sensuality leaves no room for the pursuit of higher values.

Agar, symbol of maternal love, is closer to the heart of the problem. Agar's essential femininity is the basis of her charm. Her husband Nathan himself admits that it was her quiet femininity which first attracted him:

A sibyl breathed in Agar's grace--
A sibyl, but a woman too;
He felt her grateful as the rains
To Rephaim and the Rama plains
In drought. (I, 74)

The simile in the last three lines becomes a basis for many other like images, for Agar is generally described in terms of fertility. She is lonely and ill at ease in the sterile waste of the Holy Land, and her dreams are always turned toward her former home whose fecundity provides such a rich contrast to the barren Palestinian landscape.⁵ The waste of Judah "made her lorn" (I, 106), and in an attempt to comfort herself she becomes preoccupied with an effort to reconstruct in some small way the New World which she had been forced to leave:

With cherished pots of herbs and flowers
She strove to appease the hungry hours
Each leaf bedewed with many a year
For Gentile land, how green and dear! (I, 108)

Agar's homesickness for America provides an immediate bond with Clarel who still bears about him something of the freshness of the country which he has forsaken in the quest for truth.⁶ Clarel, on his part, responds wholeheartedly to Agar's affection. He finds in her a maternal love which he had been deprived of in his youth, and

⁵It is, no doubt, these fertility images which Walter Bezanson has in mind when he considers Agar as a symbol of maternal love (Clarel, p. 360). Nathalia Wright sees the symbolic use of the Biblical name, "Agar," as further implementation of the maternal love symbolism (Melville's Use of the Bible, p. 57).

⁶Clarel, I, 106. See also the expansion of this thought in I, 109.

his heart expands beneath her devotion:

To him now first in life was shown,
In Agar's frank demeanour kind,
What charm to woman may belong
When by a natural bent inclined
To goodness in domestic play. (I, 152)

This relationship between Clarel and Agar is the proximate preparation for the love which soon springs up between Ruth and Clarel.

Here, however, we must note a certain ambiguity in the attitude toward Agar, an ambiguity suggested implicitly by the imagery which delineates her. She is, as we have said, characterized by fertility imagery; her "color" is green. Green, however, in the consistent pattern of Melville's imagery, and in Clarel in particular, does not represent the highest values. Nathalia Wright in discussing the matter provides several valuable insights:

Most original of Melville's color schemes, however, is his use of green. Since the conventional "color" for innocence, white, represented to him something much more nearly ultimate, it rarely has this meaning in his pages. But in contrast there did exist in his imagination a connection between innocence or inexperience or primitive or domestic life and the color green. Truth is colorless, but the humanities are green. ". . . green is the peculiar signet of all fertile Nature herself" (Pierre, p. 9) in contrast to the barren sea and the city, and therefore it is the emblem of the natural man in contrast to the restless inquirer after the universal secret. . . .

The Biblical image which served Melville best in this connection was the image of Eden. . . . Yet the earthly felicities which Melville had often described in terms of greenness were to him less than the highest truth. . . .⁷

This generalization as it is specifically operative in Clarel has already been suggested in Chapter I, where it was demonstrated that the few fertility images occurring in "The Wilderness" are symbolic of low human values above which the questers must rise.⁸

That Agar is not to be regarded as a wholly ideal figure is

⁷Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible, pp. 33-34.

⁸See Ch. I, sec. 3.

suggested even more explicitly in a passage describing her first reaction to Nathan's judaistic plans. Although she had always considered herself a good Jewess with a certain pride in small domestic customs and a sentimental affection for the sacred name of Jerusalem, her devotion was that of a dreamer who was incapable of working out her fancies in actual fact:

Faith, ravished, followed Fancy's path
 In more of bliss than nature hath.
 But ah, the dream to test by deed
 To seek to handle the ideal
 And make a sentiment serve need:
 And try to realise the unreal! (I, 107)

Agar, capable of constant and profound affection, is incapable of that type of profound thought which will follow convictions to their logical conclusions. Agar is satisfied with the dream. What emerges from these considerations is that Agar is a symbol of high human love, but not of deep spiritual values. Her preoccupation with the fertility of the New World is a preoccupation with material comfort and a temporal happiness which excludes struggle and suffering. In the Holy Land, Agar perceives only sterility and desolation. Such a position is inimical to the vision of the truth seeker who must be always concerned with the spiritual reality underlying superficialities. Of such a vision, Agar is not only incapable but unaware. Her affection for Clarel does not propel him forward in his quest but acts as a check to maintain him in the values of the natural life.⁹

Ruth is symbolic of the highest human love. That Ruth represents much more than her own personal identity is made explicit in a passage which begins the climactic canto, "The Celibate":

⁹For Clarel's motivation in undertaking the pilgrimage see section 4 of this chapter.

All distant through the afternoon
 The student kept, nor might attune
 His heart to any steadfast thought
 But Ruth--still Ruth, yet strange involved
 With every mystery unresolved
 In time and fate. In cloud thus caught,
 Her image laboured like a star
 Fitful revealed in midnight heaven
 When inland from the seacoast far
 The storm-rack and dark scud are driven.
 Words scarce might tell his frame, in sooth;
 'Twas Ruth, and oh, much more than Ruth. (II, 142)

Her own genealogy reinforces this symbolic role, for she is the child of a union of true love. Nathan, her father, had sacrificed his whole spiritual heritage in order to marry Agar. Forsaking Christianity, he had embraced Judaism not because he perceived the truth of its religious tenets but because such a course was essential for the fruition of his natural love.¹⁰ Of this union Ruth was the offspring. That Nathan later repudiated his original marital devotion in favor of a fanatic religious impulse does not change the circumstances of Ruth's generation.

The first glimpse of Ruth occurs at the Wailing Wall where Nehemiah had taken Clarel (I, 63-69). Ruth and Nathan perform the sterile ceremony in company with the other Jews, but Ruth's beauty is strangely out of place with the ruin and decay of the surroundings as well as of the hopeless sorrow of her companions. She is described in terms of grace and innocence: "Nature's dawn," "Eve-like face," "virgin spell" (I, 67). Yet what most impresses Clarel is that, despite her features "finely Hagarene," her face betrays something alien to Judaism; her look "blabbed of the June in some far clover land" (I, 68). Thus Ruth, like Agar, is allied with fertility images. Clarel is drawn to her not because she represents the values of the

¹⁰See Clarel, I, 75-76. It is necessary to keep in mind here that Nathan's fanatical adherence to Judaism does not occur until some time after his marriage to Agar.

Old World which he had come to seek, but precisely because she is redolent of the pleasant fecundity of the New World.

Ruth, however, does represent a type of human love more elevated than that suggested by the comfortable maternalism of Agar. This is evident in the first actual confrontation of Clarel and Ruth. This meeting, an accidental one, occurs in Nehemiah's humble dwelling (I, 90-93). Here Ruth comes, like the raven which fed the prophet Isaias, to exert a heavenly ministry. In this canto she is described not only as the Biblical raven but as "God's messenger," "a vestal white," "priestess of sweet charity," and "angel succourer" (I, 91, 93). These epithets are superior in value to the images of fertility formerly cited, but despite their religious implications they do not go beyond the sense of what we have called the "natural life."

The ministry which Ruth exercises toward Nehemiah is a natural one. She is concerned with his physical well being, and provides by her solicitude a certain spiritual comfort. She is not concerned with problems any deeper than these. While she represents values far beyond those of the Greeks and Lesbians, the difference is one of degree rather than kind.

3. The Ascetic Life

The monastery of Mar Saba is the locus for asceticism in Clarel. The asceticism implicitly present in the discussion of the quest for truth and spiritual isolation has been a natural discipline for the successful championship of a cause. In itself such discipline has no theological implications. In Part III, however, we are faced with a way of life which has its roots in theological convictions. The austerities of Mar Saba have no meaning apart from the concept of a Christian God. Although the pattern of natural asceticism may be

found in Melville's earlier works, the delineation of what essentially a Christian asceticism is new with Clarel.¹¹

The monastery of Mar Saba symbolizes the way of purification from sin in preparation for divine love. This section is replete with purgatorial images. The arduous labor which alone can make the ground productive, the preoccupation with death, the litanies for mercy which rise from the cells, the emaciated figures of the monks themselves--all betoken a mode of life based upon a penitential discipline.¹²

The attitude of fanatic self-denial, exemplified by the monks Cyril and Habbibbi, need not detain us. They represent an aberration rather than the norm. Not only are they condemned by Derwent and the Lesbian, but Clarel, too, is frightened rather than impressed by this

¹¹For examples of asceticism in Melville's earlier works, see Mardi, II, 214-215, 368; Moby Dick, p. 85; Pierre, pp. 250-252. Two dramatic interludes help to explicate the meaning of the Christian asceticism. The first is an antiphonal litany performed by the monks on the dizzy crags overlooking the Kedron and addressed to the Divine Shepherd, God of mercy (II, 87-89). The second is a masque of the Wandering Jew which suggests both the sinfulness of man and the mercy of God (II, 92-97). For another interpretation of this masque, see Bezanson, Clarel, pp. 154-155.

My whole interpretation of the symbolic values of Mar Saba differs from that of James Baird. Recognizing the monastery as a "master symbol of the pilgrimage", he writes: "the monks of Mar Saba become the sign not only of the desolation of Judaea but also of the total apostolic history of a distorted Christianity, terminating finally in man's disavowal of his nature as a human being. Always, in that bleak recollection of Clarel, Melville sees them in their endless black files. . . . The use of Shakespeare's image of the sapphire-gatherers from King Lear (IV, vi) leads to reflection upon infinitesimal figures on a beach, and invokes a sense of endlessness in the succeeding lines, as though these monks chanting the litany to the stones were the supreme emblems of utter meaninglessness."

If this is the only symbolic truth of Mar Saba, then how explain the obvious approbation accorded to the Celibate, and the sense of shame experienced by the pilgrims when their sensuous reveling is poised against the intercessory litany of the monks (II, 69-73)?

See Baird, Ishmael, pp. 415-517.

¹²See Clarel, II, 45-48, 72-73, 87-89, 92-97, 117-120, 131-133.

weird pattern of life, while the narrator in his description of Cyril indicates the wide gulf which separates his mad fanaticism from the austere discipline of such figures as the Syrian monk, the Dominican friar, and the Celebate. As Cyril tends the mausoleum of the monastery, the narrator comments:

He looked like one
Whose life is but a patience mere,
Or worse, a fetting doubt of cheer
Beyond; he toiled as in employ
Imposed, a bondman far from joy. (II, 118)¹³

This description provides an implicit contrast with that of the monk met near the Quarantania who, by penance, has won a certain visible purity:

A young strange man of aspect thin
From vigils which in fast begin.
Though, pinned together with the thorn
His robe was ragged all and worn--
Pure did he show as mountain-leaf
By brook, or coral washed in reef.
.....
And in the contour clear and grace,
So all unworldly was the face,
He looked a later Baptist John. (I, 240)¹⁴

Far more important than these tangential figures is the character of the Celibate who serves as a focal point for the explication of Christian asceticism.

As Clarel wanders alone among the crags of Saba, he comes upon a figure, dressed in a blue robe, and engaged in calling the flocks of doves which hover about him. Although, as his title indicates, he is symbolic of a type of renunciation, yet the images which describe him emphasize not the marks of his rigorous life but the peace which he possesses as a consequence of such a life. In this he is set apart from the other monks of Saba who have about them an aura of peniten-

¹³For a description of Habbibbi's cell with its fanatical engravings, see II, 132-133.

¹⁴See also the description of the Dominican, I, 271.

tial gloom. Once again as in the case of the Syrian monk and the Dominican, it is his look of purity which is singled out for special attention:

Nor fortune's darling here was seen,
But heaven's elect. The robe of blue
So sorted with the doves in hue
Prevailing, and clear skies serene
Without a cloud; so pure he showed--
Of stature tall, in aspect bright--
He looked an almoner of God
Dispenser of the bread of light. (II, 143)¹⁵

The impression of purity and divine peace which the Celibate creates is implemented by the doves, Judaic symbols of simplicity and innocence: and native of

. . . natives--not of Venus' court
Voluptuous with wanton wreath--
But colonnades where Enoch roves,
Or walks with God, as Scripture saith. (II, 144)

This description reinforces the conflict of the two polarities: Venus, conventional symbol of human love, and the Judaic God, symbol of the highest spiritual love.

The Celibate represents the man who has sacrificed all natural comfort in search of spiritual values. His austerities, difficult though they be, have led him to a reward of enduring peace. Cut off from human love and earthly affection, he has found a divine love which more than compensates for what he has relinquished.

It is through the Celibate that Clare's conflict between the natural life and the ascetic life is brought into full relief. This serene figure acts as a catalyst through which the opposing forces of natural love and divine love are brought into confrontation in Clare's mind. The Celibate himself, however, is not the symbol of

¹⁵The phrase "not fortune's darling" is in direct contrast to that used to describe the Greek banker, "a wight whom Lady Fortune loved" (I, 175).

the highest spiritual love; that distinction is reserved for Salvaterra, whom the pilgrims encounter in the monastery at Bethlehem.

As the pilgrims enter Bethlehem and begin their tour of the Church of the Star, they have as guide "a slender monk and young" (II, 206) who, in his coarse habit with its rope girdle, is reminiscent of the Syrian monk of Mount Quarantania. This young Franciscan is described not only as an ascetic but as a Tuscan nobleman who had relinquished all to pursue his vocation as a friar:

Led by a slender monk and young,
With curls that ringed the shaven crown,
.....
And sandals which expose the skin
Transparent, and the blue vein thin
Meandering there: the feet, the face
Alike in lucid marble grace.
His simple manner self-possessed
Both saint and noble-born suggest;
Yet under quietude they mark
They slumbering of a vivid spark--
Excitable, if brought to test.
A Tuscan, he exchanged the charm
Val d'Arno yields, for this dull calm
Of desert. Was his youth self-given
In frank oblation unto heaven?
Or what inducement might disarm
This Isaac when too young to know? (II, 206-207)

The suggestion of the last two lines, that Salvaterra has accepted his vocation through some worldly coercion is implicitly repudiated by the remainder of the canto. In him, as in all the other symbols of asceticism, is noted "the grace of a pure heart" (II, 209). His "ascetic insight" (II, 214) permits him to see beyond appearances and to recognize that Ungar's sword is in reality a "cross", a sign of suffering. Only Derwent doubts the worth of the young friar, as he comments, "'For all his charity divine Unmanly seems he!'" Rolfe replies with some indignation, indicating that the word "manly" must be properly understood:

"But even at best, one might reply,
Man is that thing of sad renown

Which moved a deity to come down
 And save him. Lay not too much stress
 Upon the carnal manliness:
 The Christliness is better-higher;" (II, 217)

Whatever Derwent may think of Salvaterra, it is obvious that Rolfe, Vine, Ungar, and Clarel are impressed by the profound faith and passionate devotion to his spiritual ideals. In him they find a total dedication in which the element of struggle has become subsumed in divine love. As Ruth is the child of human love, Salvaterra is the product of divine love. His spirit is one of impassioned joy. His full symbolic role will be seen more clearly in the section devoted to the conflict of the opposing forces of naturalism and asceticism.

4. The Forces in Conflict

The conflict of these warring forces is given dramatic presentation in the canto, "The Revel Closed" (II, 69-73). The scene takes place in the monastery of Mar Saba. Despite the penitential air of the place, the pilgrims, led by the Lesbian, spend the night in singing and drinking. As the party reaches its climax, the revelers are suddenly confronted by the opposing force of asceticism:

But hark: while here light fell the clink
 The five cups made touched brink to brink
 In the fair bouquet of fellowship,
 And just as the gay Lesbian's lip
 Was parted--jetting came a wail
 In Litany from Kedron's jail
 Profound, and belly of the whale:

"Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Intercede for me,
Angel of the Agony.
Spare me, spare me!
Merciful be--
Lord, spare me--
Spare and deliver me!"

Arrested, those five revellers there,
 Fixed in light postures of their glee,
 Seemed problematic shapes ye see

In linked caprice of festal air
Graved round the Greek sarcophagi. (II, 72-73)

Thus, a kind of pagan Epicureanism is posed against Christian asceticism. This scene provides a dramatic symbol of the opposition between these two modes of life which, throughout the poem, are brought into conflict in the person of the hero.

This essential opposition has been foreshadowed in the position of Nathan. Nathan represents the man who attempts to possess the values of both ways of life. Yet it becomes clear that whatever is given to one of these forces is given only at the expense of the other. Nathan's natural love for his wife was so strong at first that in order to please her he rejected his religious heritage and became a Jew. His devotion to his new religion soon becomes so strong, however, that he forces Agar to sacrifice all the comforts of her home in order to journey with him to the Holy Land. The more intense Nathan's religious zeal becomes, the more he sacrifices the interests of his wife and children. Once in Jerusalem he subjects them to a fresh separation; because of the danger of marauding Arabs he insists that they live within the walls of Jerusalem while he remains alone on the Sharon plain. Nathan's peril and her own loneliness cause Agar deep grief, and she begs her husband to give up his mad venture:

Agar with sobs of suppliance prayed
That he would fix there: "Ah, for good
Tarry! abide with us, thine own;
Put not these blanks between us; should
Such space be for a shadow thrown?
Quit Sharon, husband; leave to brood;
Serve God by cleaving to thy wife" (I, 78)

To Agar's supplications Nathan turns a deaf ear because of the religious purpose to which he is sacrificing all else. On the other hand, he is prevented from a total dedication to religious values

because of the necessary obligations imposed upon him by his family. In the end, Nathan dies still attempting to possess both "household comfort" and "inveterate zeal." ¹⁶

Although with Clarel the conflict does not take explicit dramatic form until the end of the poem, it is prepared for implicitly from the first meeting of Clarel and Ruth. Clarel, gazing on Ruth, feels himself deeply moved in a manner never before experienced:

To Clarel's heart there came a swell
Like the first tide that ever pressed
Inland, and of a deep did tell. (I, 96)

The culmination of this first romantic presage is reached in an idyllic interlude in which the two lovers see all nature reflecting their own mutual affection. In their absorption in each other they shut out, as though it did not exist, everything incongruous with their own joy:

Clarel and Ruth--might it be
That range they could green uplands free
By gala orchards, when they fling
Their bridal favours, buds of Spring;
.....
And youth and nature's fond accord
Wins Eden back, that tales abstruse
Of Christ, the crucified, Pain's Lord,
Seem foreign--forged--incongruous. (I, 110)¹⁷

For the moment at least, Clarel and Ruth have entered into an earthly paradise in which any thought of sorrow seems alien. The path of human love as it is delineated in these lines leaves no place for the mystery of suffering and is, therefore, a repudiation of the path of divine love which, as we have seen, includes suffer-

¹⁶See Clarel, I, 77-79, 108-109, 162-164.

¹⁷This passage is reminiscent of the idyllic young love of Lucy and Pierre (Book II). What becomes almost immediately clear in Pierre and is developed more slowly but explicitly in Clarel is that the flaw in idyllic human love is that it cannot indefinitely ban those "tales abstruse" bespeaking pain, suffering and evil.

ing as an essential element. Clarel, however, does not immediately realize that the values which Ruth symbolizes are incongruous with those higher values for which he had come to search. He is still blinded to this essential truth even as he decides to join the pilgrimage, for this journey is undertaken not as a decision to relinquish Ruth with the values which she symbolizes but as an interlude until the ban which Nathan's death has placed upon the Jewish household is lifted and he is free to enjoy Ruth's company once more. Such an attitude suggests an immature appreciation of the values involved. Clarel at the beginning of his pilgrimage attempts, as did Nathan, to retain the two forces of both human and divine love; not until the end of the poem does he recognize the essential opposition between them.

Throughout the pilgrimage various episodes prepare the reader for the final conflict. Both Celio and Vine are lovers of spiritual values, and in these symbolic roles, exert an influence designed to draw Clarel away from Ruth toward a more permanent goal. For this meaning, the most significant passage occurs shortly before the death of Celio. Clarel, having just heard the story of Nathan, is pondering upon the strange lot of Ruth, but finds his thoughts impinged upon by Celio, representative of courageous spiritual desires. While images of Ruth fill his natural desires, images of Celio take possession of the more spiritual portion of his soul:

Fain Clarel here had mused thereon,
 But more upon Ruth's lot, so twined
 With clinging ill. But every thought
 Of Ruth was strangely underrun
 By Celio's image. Celio sought
 Vainly in body--now appeared
 As in the spiritual part,
 Haunting the air, and in the heart. (I, 81)

Later, it is Vine who, more ambiguously perhaps, assumes this role. Clarel, even after his proffer of friendship has been re-

jected, still confesses to the influence exerted by his fellow pilgrim. He is unnerved by his emotions which seem so traitorous to Ruth and upbraids himself with:

Nay, dizzard, sick these feelings are;
How findest place within thy heart
For such sollicitudes apart
From Ruth? (I, 288)

Again, following his encounter with the Celibate of Mar Saba (which we will discuss below) he is forced to concede that thoughts of Vine still run through his mind. Despite his avowed love for Ruth, he is not completely satisfied at the thought of possessing her:

How vaguely, while yet influenced so
By late encounter, and his glance
Rested on Vine, his reveries flow
Recalling that repulsed advance
He knew by Jordan in the wood,
And the enigma unsubdued--
Possessing Ruth, nor less his heart
Aye hungering still, in deeper part
Unsatisfied. (II, 146)¹⁸

It is, however, the figure of the Celibate of Mar Saba who brings the polarity of the forces into full relief. Following Clarel's meeting with him on the crag overlooking the mystic palm, a conversation ensues which makes explicit the conflict with which Clarel had so long wrestled: the war between flesh and spirit, between human and divine love. The student gazing upon the peace of the other's tranquil countenance breaks the silence with the words, "Father. . . Here, sure, is peace" (II, 144). The Celibate makes no reply, for, as the narrator indicates, his was a peace which could not brook the "touch of word." And yet, Clarel, continues, it is a peace totally unenhanced by domestic comfort or human love:

"Father, if Good, 'tis unenhanced:
No life domestic do ye own

¹⁸On four other occasions, as Clarel wrestles with the problems of faith and doubt, a vision of Ruth slides into his imagination (I, 239, 297; II, 119, 142).

Within these walls: woman I miss,
 Like cranes, what years from time's abyss
 Their flight have taken, one by one,
 Since Saba founded this retreat:
 In cells here many a stifled moan
 Of lonely generations gone;
 And more shall pine as more shall fleet." (II, 144)

Clarel's allusions to the lack of women and to the lonely generations which have died within the surrounding cells evoke no response from the Celibate. His only answer to Clarel's difficulties is to hand him a "silver-clasped and vellum book" (II, 145). This ancient Christian manual, composed by a hermit in the time of Decius, offers small comfort to the man who would hope to serve both God and mammon:

And lustral hymns and prayers were here:
 Renouncings, yearnings, charges dread
 Against our human nature dear;
 Worship and wail, which, if misled,
 In heart which, striving in their fear
 Of clay, to bridle, curb or kill;
 In the pure desert of the will
 Chastised, live the vowed life austere. (II, 145)

Clarel's first reaction is to recoil before this doctrine; but as he continues to peruse its austere teachings he finds himself unable to withstand the philosophy which this strange old book contains. As he turns to the Celibate, no doubt in search of some further explanation, he finds himself alone. The Celibate has left him to ponder in silence and solitude the mystery of the opposing forces. The meaning of this sudden disappearance of the monk is never made clear. Possibly, however, it is to suggest that to the problem of these two opposing forces there is no generic solution: Clarel must reach a decision not by guidance from without but from the inner dictates of his own heart.

Despite the climactic structure of the canto, it terminates without the hero having reached a decision. He watches alone beneath the shadow of the palm until the sun sets, but his conflict

remains unresolved. In the moonlight, he is roused from his apathy, and once again faces the issues which vex him. He finds himself recoiling from the strange charm of that Celibate who "shared heaven on earth in gracious calm" (II, 147):

And needs from that high mentor part?
Is strength too strong to teach the weak?
Though tame the life seem, turn the cheek,
Does the call elect the hero heart?--
The thunder smites our tropic bloom:
If live the abodes unvexed and balmy--
No equinox with annual doom;
.....
Or in yon worlds of light is known
The clear intelligence alone?
Express the Founder's words declare,
Marrying none is in the heaven;
Yet love in heaven itself to spare--
Love feminine! Can Eve be riven
From sex, and disengaged retain
Its charm? (II, 148)

As he continues to meditate on the problem of sexual love, he begins to doubt the duration of all human love, which, it seems, must end with the grave. If there is to be no marrying in love, then, perhaps, Eve's charm does not endure "divine transplanting" (II, 148)--perhaps all human love comes to the end at the grave. Such a conclusion is hard for Clarel to accept, and leads to his anguished cry, "'Is naught then trustworthy but God?'" (II, 148). To this query no answer is forthcoming, and Clarel continues his journey still torn by the divisive forces of human and divine love.

Although the counsel given by the Celibate does not resolve Clarel's problem it does prepare him for the final act in the conflict. At Bethlehem, two symbolic representations of the warring forces are brought into immediate contact. These are Salvaterra, whom we have already designated as the symbol of the highest values of asceticism, and the Lyonesse to whom Derwent gives the epithet,

"young Bacchus" (II, 270).¹⁹

Although Clarel does not learn until later that the Lyonese is an apostate, his symbolic value is reinforced by the fact that he is actually a Jew who has repudiated his religious heritage for reasons of material advancement (II, 275-276). Like Salvaterra, he, too, possesses a mobile and attractive face, and that charm of movement which is peculiarly southern in its grace. He receives the full approbation of Derwent who comments as he watches him:

" . . . What's good to see
Better than Adam's humanity
When genial lodged!" (II, 276)

Derwent's approval is countered, however, by the judgement of the narrator who refers to the Lyonese as a "toy of Mammon" (II, 261).

During the night they spend together, Clarel attempts to draw the Lyonese into religious conversation, especially concerning the Judaic tradition, but the only interest that Clarel can evoke in things Jewish is the opulent beauty of the Jewish women.²⁰ The student's own profound spiritual doubts make no impression on the young apostate who pursues his joyous sybaritic philosophy without shame or regret. In answer to Clarel's questions concerning the strange lot of Jerusalem, he retorts:

"Well, me for one, dame Judah here
Don't much depress: she's not austere--
Nature has lodged her in good zone--
The true wine-zone of Noah: the Cape
Yields no such bounty of the grape." (II, 264)

Watching this superficial young man reveling in his earthly happiness,

¹⁹ Once again I take exception to Baird's evaluation of the symbolic value represented by the Lyonese. Baird concentrates upon his physical beauty and considers him another instance of tayo, a primitive offer of fraternal union. Considered in these terms the Lyonese symbolizes a "good," but that is not the whole story, as the interpolations of the narrator suggest. Baird, Ishmael, p. 208.

²⁰ See all of the canto, "The Prodigal," (II, 260-269).

Clarel begins to doubt the wisdom of his own serious mode of life, wondering if he is, perhaps, "too curious" (II, 262), prying into questions which might be better left undisturbed.

In the night, Clarel has a dream which dramatically sharpens the forces in conflict:

And Clarel dreamed, and seemed to stand
Betwixt a Shushan and a sand;
The Lyonesse was lord of one,
The desert did the Tuscan own,
The pale pure monk. A zepher fanned;
It vanished, and he felt the strain
Of clasping arms which would detain
His heart from each ascetic range. (II, 269)

When he wakes, he feels within himself an "organic change" (II, 269), a subtle innovation of thought which is the last preparation for his decision.

On Shrove Tuesday, the day the pilgrimage leaves Bethlehem for the homeward journey, Clarel makes his election. His choice is Ruth, symbol of natural happiness:

Yea, now his hand would boldly reach
And pluck the nodding fruit to him,
Fruit of the tree of life. If doubt
Spin spider-like her tissue out,
And make a snare in reason dim--
Why hang a fly in flimsy web?
One thing was clear, one thing is sooth;
Stays not the prime of June or youth:
A flood that tide makes haste to ebb. (II, 279)²¹

With this decision Clarel's anguished doubts leave him: he thinks of happier skies, warblings of hope, and an inner buoyancy (II, 279). Running counter to Clarel's sense of elation, however, are the sober comments of the narrator. Speaking of his initial decision, the narratory voice questions:

²¹Newton Arvin's comment that Clarel's decision provides him with the one moment of joy that he feels throughout the poem suggests that his choice was the "right choice." The context is, however, too equivocal to bear out this conclusion. (Melville, p. 277)

Was it abrupt resolve? a strain
Wiser than wisdom's self might teach? (II, 278)

And this same tone is continued a little further on:

Was part caprice, sally of youth?
What pulse was this with burning beat?
Whence, whence the passion that could give
Feathers to thought, yea, Mercury's feet?
The Lyonesse, to sense so dear,
Nor less from faith a fugitive--
Had he infected Clarel here? (II, 279)

These lines, with their suggestion that Clarel in accepting the values of the apostate Lyonesse is making himself a fugitive from faith, act as a preparation for the student's sudden relapse into gloom and doubt. Once again he sees the calm, peaceful eyes of the Celibate, the austere philosophy of the old vellum book. He finds he is no longer able to banish the ideal of asceticism in favor of the loving but, perhaps, deceitful eyes of Ruth:

Ah, almoner to Saba's dove,
Ah, bodeful text of hermit-rhyme!
But what! distrust the trustful eyes?
Are the sphered breasts full of mysteries
Which not the maiden's self may know?
May love's nice balance, finely slight,
Take tremor from fulfilled delight?
Can Nature such a doom dispense
As, after ardour's tender glow,
To make the rapture more than pall
With evil secrets in the sense,
And guile whose bud is innocence--
Sweet blossom of the flower of gall? (II, 279-280)

In an effort to bolster his decision in favor of human love, he argues with himself that to consider the pleasures of the senses as sinful is to ally himself with the heresy of Manichaeism. He recalls that the generality of men find salvation within a normal marriage. Why, then, can he not repress his desires for the values of the ascetic life and ally himself with the majority? With this reasoning in mind, he pursues his course toward Jerusalem and the object of his human love. His decision comes too late for earthly

fulfillment, however, for at the gate of the city he is brought face to face with the dead bodies of Ruth and Agar.²²

What place does the death of Ruth play in this complex theme of decisions and reversals? One thing it indicates: the decision of man is not the last act in the drama. Clarel chooses, but his choice is negated by a force which he is powerless to parry. There can be little doubt that Ruth represents values other than those which Clarel had come to seek. The student had left his homeland in quest of truth; such a quest demands that the quester abandon commonplace, known values and identify himself with a spiritual isolation. Part of Ruth's charm for Clarel is, however, her connection with known values--she is identified not with the Palestinian landscape but with the fertility of the New World. The student's choice of Ruth suggests, then, a repudiation of the quest for truth. But Clarel's election is countered by a direct act of a higher force and by that act Clarel is forced back upon his pilgrim's quest. Ruth is dead, and Clarel is, perforce, a celibate. Clarel chose happiness and instead he is immersed in the darkest pain. Perhaps Melville wishes to imply that the hero's long dallying with lower values has temporarily unfitted him for the spiritual revelation which he sought and for which he must now wait in painful isolation.

Despite the ambiguities of the conclusion certain elements have been clarified by a perusal of this theme: human love (or natural happiness) and divine love (or the quest for God) are mutually exclusive forces. Human love is of a lower order, although it is never condemned in itself, and may reach a high degree of

22

Bezanson assumes that to choose a monastic existence would be to deliberately avoid tragic experience, while to choose Ruth is to thrust toward tragedy in the typical posture of a Melvillean hero. Bezanson, Clarel, pp. 303-304.

value. Divine love, both because of the nature of the quest implied and because of the sinfulness of man's nature, demands a certain purgation provided by the system of Christian asceticism. Such asceticism may range in degree from a fanatical frenzy to a heavenly peace and joy. Man, composed of a spiritual and carnal substance, is always susceptible to the attacks of these two warring forces. His duty is to choose between them, for indecision commits him to the pursuit of dual ends--a pursuit which can end only in disaster.

the struggle for that... with great... frequently... leaving... the... the... are not consistently represented.

with... creeds... logic... tions... conflict of faith... religious thought... that... really... will be... which he... work.¹

In order to understand the... operates in Clarel, we must keep in mind that the major quest of the pilgrimage is not for

¹ Griffiths, *Melville's Search for God*, pp. 310-311.

THE STRUGGLE FOR FAITH

"Hast thou ever helped carry a bier, and heard the coffin knock against the church-yard door, going in?"

"Faith, sir, I've--"

"Faith? What's that?"

"Why, faith, sir, it's only a sort of exclamation-like--that's all, sir."

(Moby Dick, p. 520)

One of the most pervasive themes in Melville's work is that of the struggle for theologic faith. It is a theme which is approached with great ambivalence on the part of the author and which, consequently, presents the reader with many ambiguities. Clarel, however, lacking as it does the symbolic depths of the major novels, provides the most direct approach to the problem, although even here the meaning of faith and the corollaries which flow from this meaning are not consistently represented.

While Melville could never rest in the platitudes of sectarian creeds, neither could he force himself to a repudiation of all theologic faith. In whatever terms he couches his metaphysical speculations, their theologic foundations are always implicit. It is this conflict of faith and doubt which produces the tension in his religious thought. Frank Griffith, observing this phenomenon, remarks that "a profession of doubt among Melville protagonists does not really choke off their basically religious impulses." It is this "will to believe counterbalanced by the steadfast refusal to believe" which he cites as the fundamental paradox in Melville's work.¹

In order to understand the paradox as it operates in Clarel, we must keep in mind that the major quest of the pilgrimage is not for

¹Griffith, Melville's Search for God, pp. 310-311.

faith but for truth. Clarel's avowed purpose is to cut himself off from the known pattern of things and face things as they actually are. Thus, if faith is true, if it is part of the quester's vision, then he will accept it; but if faith is not true, if it is but a chimera to comfort the lonely and insecure pilgrim, then faith must be sacrificed in the cause of truth. Whatever religious positions are viewed, they must be always examined under the basic formality of truth.

With this criterion clearly established, we may examine the theme under the following headings: faith and the contemporary scene, the bulwark of fideism, the object of faith, the Catholic position.

1. Faith and the Contemporary Scene

Following a fruitless discussion of religious faith (II, 20-26), there occurs a metaphor which acts as a symbol for the whole problem as it operates in Clarel:

At night upon the darkling main
To ship return with muffled sound
The rowers without comment vain--
The messmate overboard not found:
So baffled in deep quest but late,
These on the mountain. (II, 27)

Faith for the pilgrims has the aspect of a messmate fallen overboard and lost to them forever in the heavy swells of the sea. They do what they can to reclaim him but the task is futile in the face of the darkness and the waves.

It has been suggested previously that Clarel represents the modern consciousness seeking its salvation amid the conflicting claims of contemporary values. In the second canto of the poem, the narrator comments as Clarel looks out over the sleeping city of Jerusalem, "The nature and evangel clashed" (I, 13). This suggestion of conflict between the forces of faith and nature is further

implemented in the canto, "Tribes and Sects" (I, 29-30). Clarel's first exploration of the Holy Places takes him to the Sepulchre where the body of the dead Christ is said to have lain. Here, at the very fountain of Christianity, the hero finds his faith slacken. Torn between belief and skepticism, he hears voices which condemn him with the cry:

Out, out--begone! try Nature's reign
 Who deem'st the super-nature vain:
 To Lot's Wave by black Kedron rove;
 On, by Seir, through Edom move;
 There crouch thee with the jackal down--
 Grave solace of the scorpion! (I, 29)

Despite his explicit avowal that he wishes to cut himself free from preconceptions (I, 5), Clarel experiences great spiritual anguish when he feels himself condemned as an unbeliever, beyond the pale of faith. Such ambivalence is not only Melville's own position, but one of the basic problems of the mid-nineteenth century.

In this attitude Melville has much in common with his Victorian brethren. The temporal cycles of In Memoriam and the spatial cycle of Clarel bear marked thematic resemblance, and if Tennyson's verse is notably superior, Melville's thought manifests a sinewy strength which bears competent witness to his clear perception. Graced with the physical vitality of the New World, Melville could never content himself with faintly trusting the larger hope; as he was impatient of inaction in his physical life, so he was impatient of vague generalities in his spiritual life. The inner realities in which he would put his trust must be able to stand close scrutiny; the ephemeral philosophies which lulled the misgivings of many of his contemporaries held no comfort for Melville whose keen spiritual

the very interesting article of Walter Bezanson, "Melville's Reading of Arnold's Poetry," *PMLA* LXIX (1954), 385-391.

perception bore beneath the superficies to penetrate the inner core.²

Like Arnold, he knew the pangs of doubt, the anguish of being suspended between two worlds without being able to give allegiance to either.³ As the pilgrims discuss the possibility of immortality, following Nehemiah's death, there arises the question of a heaven even for unbelievers:

Do seraphim shed balm
At last on all of earnest mind,
Unworldly yearners, nor the palm
Awarded St. Teresa, ban
To Leopardi, Obermann? (II, 3)

The tragic figure of Obermann in which Arnold mirrored his own spiritual position is used in Clarel as a symbol of a brave and uncompromising doubt, a doubt which is its own martyrdom and which may, perhaps, achieve through suffering its own heaven.

This struggle for faith in the contemporary world is brought into focus in Clarel through faith's most powerful enemies, scientific materialism and political liberalism.

Melville, living as he did in an era in which the advances of science encroached upon the territory formerly conceded to faith, was enmeshed, as were his contemporaries, in the faith-science conflict. Margoth is, of course, the symbol of the new science which interprets all of life in terms of its own materialistic laws. Margoth consistently repudiates all spiritual values in favor of scientific materialism. For him, "all's geology" (I, 278), as he so often reiterates. He is the man who not only has no faith but feels no need for faith.

²For Melville's impatience with the unqualified optimism of Transcendentalism, see Ch. V, sec. 1.

³For the whole problem of Arnold's influence on Melville, see the very interesting article of Walter Bezanson, "Melville's Reading of Arnold's Poetry," *PMLA* LXIX (1954), 365-391.

As Rolfe and Derwent discuss the difficulties of scriptural exegesis, Margoth indicates that for him religious faith is but a remnant of superstition. It is only a black bat, half dead and unable to keep her original position, and yet too stubborn to give up the hopeless fight:

"Your black bat! how she hangs askew
Torpido, from walls by claws of wings:
Let drop the left--sticks fast the right;
Than this unhook--the other swings;
Leave--she regains her double plight." (I, 259)

He assumes this same brutal and ignorant tone in answer to the explanation of the Dominican friar concerning the Church of Rome. Margoth's ribaldry is in marked contrast to the interest and respect of the other pilgrims. As the Dominican leaves to join his group, the scientist calls out after him:

"Patcher of the rotten cloth,
Pickler of the wing o' the moth,
Toaster of bread stale in date,
Tinker of the rusty plate,
Botcher of a crumbling tomb,
Pounder with the holy hammer,
Gaffer-gammer, gaffer-gammer--
Rome! (I, 278)

Such is the simplest expression of a total repudiation of theology faith. Like most extremes it is not dangerous for the majority who easily see through the oversimplification of such an attitude. Margoth is generally repudiated by the other pilgrims who, despite their differences, have in common a belief, or at least the desire of belief, in some kind of spiritual value. In no scene does the geologist emerge other than an object of contempt and ridicule. It is not this radical materialism of Margoth which represents a peril to faith but the various subtle and complex shadings which proceed from it.⁴

Shortly after Mortmain's disappearance into the desert, the

⁴Bezanson, commenting on Melville's portrait of Margoth, writes: "For his negation of the spiritual life Melville reviles Margoth. . . Such was his condemnation of pretentious men who refuse to grapple with the spiritual nature of man and the world." Clarel, p. 276.

pilgrims notice an inscription carved on a giant rock. Upon closer inspection they discover it to be a rude drawing of the Southern Cross and some lines in verse bewailing the disappearance of Christianity and the advent of the "atheist cycles" (I, 303). Above the inscription the author reveals his identity as, "one who wails the loss, This altar to the Slanting Cross!" (I, 302). The tone of the lines which follow make it easy for the pilgrims to identify Mortmain as their composer:

"Emblazoned bleak in austral skies--
A heaven remote, whose starry swarm
Like Science lights but cannot warm--
Translated Cross, hast thou withdrawn,
Dim paling too at every dawn,
With symbols vain once counted wise,
And gods declined to heraldries?" (I, 302)

Mortmain, looking at the constellation of the Southern Cross with its bright but cold stars, sees in it an image of the Christian cross which also seems to have withdrawn leaving the world a frigid prey to the godlessness of the approaching ages. For the other pilgrims the incident merely deepens their pity for Mortmain's mania, but for Margoth it becomes an opportunity to indicate the triumph of science. Tarrying behind the other pilgrims, he adds two more lines to the inscription:

"I, Science, I whose gain's thy loss,
I slanted thee, thou Slanting Cross." (I, 304)

While Margoth's extreme view is never taken seriously, it is true that all too frequently the gains of science do represent a loss to religious faith. It is Rolfe who perceives most clearly the dangers of the more subtle encroachments which science may make on the field of faith. It is just such a gain that Rolfe notes in the liberal Derwent who underplays the role of God in his effort to unfold the important progress which science has made in human knowledge. "Symbolic polarity" as "the most impressive attribute of his action." Ishmael, pp. 188-189. See also p. 79.

As Rolfe and the Anglican discuss the position of Margoth, the latter indicates a marked enthusiasm for the advances of science, for "Newton and his gravitation," and the "claims of stellar chemistry" (I, 252). "Science has her eagles" is his retort to Rolfe's condemnation of Margoth. But Rolfe with his more penetrating mind holds to his point that whatever progress has been made along scientific lines has been made at the expense of far more important values. In answer to Derwent's optimism, he counters:

" . . . be frank and own.
 Opinion eats; all crumbles down;
 Where stretched an isthmus, rolls a strait:
 Cut off, cut off! Canst feel elate
 While all the depths of Being moan,
 Though luminous on every hand,
 The breadths of shallow knowledge more expand?
 Much as a lightship keeper pines
 Mid shoals immense, where dreary shines
 His lamp, we toss beneath the ray
 Of Science' beacon. This to trim
 Is now man's barren office." (I, 254-255)

In Rolfe's eyes, science has not only diminished the dignity of God but of man as well, making the latter no more than a lonely lighthouse-keeper tending the beacon of science.⁵

The other pilgrims indicate a general acceptance of Rolfe's position. In the discussion of religious problems which follows shortly after Nehemiah's death, there is a general suspicion of the bright future promised by scientific materialism. Wistfully the pilgrims recall the uncompromising attitude of the Church of Rome toward the first scientific advances and wonder, now, if perhaps her course was not the wisest one:

Science and Faith, can these unite?
 Or is that priest instinct right

⁵Clarel, I, 252-255. Baird categorizes Melville's tendency toward "symbolic polarity" as "the most impressive attribute of his imagination." *Ishmael*, pp. 188-189. See also p. 79.

(Right as regards conserving still
The Church's reign) whose strenuous will
Made Galileo pale recite
The Penitential Psalms in vest
Of sackcloth.⁶ (II, 22)

Looking about them at the sterile landscape, the pilgrims sense that the magnificent destiny which science had promised to man is already failing. The final unanswered question with which the discussion ends is couched in deep pessimism:

In one result whereto we tend
Shall Science disappoint the hope,
Yea, to confound us in the end,
New doors to superstition ope?
As years, as years and annals grow,
And action and reaction vie,
And never men attain, but know
How waves on waves forever die;
Does all more enigmatic show? (II, 24)

The realm of faith thus unjustly invaded by the new science is further endangered by the rising political order. Throughout the century, Europe, impatient with an obsolete regime, was catapulted into a series of political upheavals increasingly turbulent in nature.

Both Ungar and Mortmain are painfully aware of the possible end to which the revolutions which rock Europe may be leading. As the cavalcade passes Gethsemane, the Swede hurls his first invective against the new political order:

". . . . Ye trunks of moan--
Gethsemane olives, do ye year
The trump of that vainglorious land
Where human nature they enthrone,
Displacing the divine?" (I, 185-186)

Mortmain's bitter denunciation of the French revolutionists is augmented by Ungar's hatred for the new order of democracy which he has seen established in the United States. He goes a step beyond

⁶For an explanation of the Catholic position in regard to science, see sec. 4 of this chapter.

Mortmain and prophecies that men in losing reverence for human authority soon lose it for divine authority as well. Ungar, too, recalls the political upheavals in France, admitting that with each new advance in political liberty, God is pushed that much more into the background. In the beginning there was no "disrespect for God" (II, 245), but in the latter days even the crucifix was torn from its place to be used as a clothes-stand:

"The Revolution, whose first mode,
Ere yet the maniacs overrode,
Despite the passion of the dream,
Evinced no disrespect for God;
.....
They took the crucifix; in van
They put it, marched with drum and psalm
And throned it in their Notre-Dame.
But yesterday--how did they then,
In new uprising of the Red,
The offspring of those Tuileries men?
They made a clothes-stand of the Cross
Before the church; and, on that head
Which bowed for them, could wanton toss
The sword-belt, while the gibing sped." (II, 245)⁷

While Derwent is inclined to make light of the doom which both Mortmain and Ungar prophesy, Rolfe, product of the New World, admits that in the American democratic order he was given "vile liberty to reverence naught" (I, 282). Even before he had listened to the arguments of Ungar, Rolfe had, following their debate with the Dominican, pronounced the final crash which the new order, if victorious, will project:

"..... men
Get tired at last of being free--
Whether in states--in states or creeds.
For what's the sequel? Verily,
Laws scribbled by law-breakers, creeds
Scrawled by the free-thinkers, and deeds
Shameful and shameless.
.....

⁷See also Ch. V., sec. 2.

Rome and the Atheist have gained:
 These two shall fight it out--these two;
 Protestantism being retained
 For base of operations sly
 By Atheism. (I, 281-282)

The license of anarchy will never satisfy the desires of men, and the new state which will follow will be far worse than the rigidity of the old order. Law itself will be perverted by those free-thinkers who will subvert it to their own shameful ends. All of this will sharpen the forces for the final conflict--the forces of atheism arrayed against the one remaining opposing force, that of Roman Catholicism.⁸

Despite the sense of impending calamity which the above passage suggests, the overthrow of faith never actually occurs in Clarel. The pervasive tone is one of struggle with success as a possible conclusion. This tone is reinforced throughout by the imagery of light through which faith is symbolized.⁹ Although the lamps at the various sanctuaries often burn but dimly, they are never entirely eclipsed.

2. The Bulwark of Fideism

The opposite polarity from nineteenth century materialism is that of fideism. This temper of mind attempts to explain all phenomena on the grounds of faith alone. Losing the scholastic concept that reason assists faith, fideism persists in making judgements totally divorced from rationality. It is precisely such an attitude that, in Mardi, evoked Babbalanja's ironical comment concerning

⁸For the implication that Roman Catholicism alone will remain to oppose the forces of atheism, see sec. 4 of this chapter.

⁹For such images of faith, see Clarel, I, 6, 23, 25, 160, 314; II, 213. Other parallels, see Clarel, I, 32, 134, 144, 177, 208.

faith; ". . . no act is required; only passiveness. Stand still and receive. Faith is to the thoughtless, doubts to the thinker" (II, 126).¹⁰

In Clarel, it is Nehemiah who represents the fideistic mentality. Clarel's first meeting with the old evangelist reveals him beyond doubt as the man of faith, and, even more specifically, as a Biblist who takes the Scriptures alone as the source of his guidance. By a number of imagistic parallels, he is equated with the figure of Christ who also had as His mission the conversion of Jerusalem. One of the most significant of these parallels occurs at his first meeting with Clarel. The young student wandering beyond the walls of Jerusalem thinks wistfully of the disciples of Emmaus who were rescued from their doubts by Christ Himself. How easy it would be to believe, he ponders, if here today I, too, could meet "some stranger of a lore replete" who like the Risen One would prove and expound the Scriptures to me (I, 32). With this expression of his longing, Nehemiah draws near to him:

He lifts his eyes, and, outlined there,
Saw, as in answer to the prayer,
A man who silent came and slow
Just over the intervening brow
Of a high slope. Nearer he drew
Revealed against clear skies of blue;
And--in that Syrian air of charm--
He seemed, illusion such was given,
Emerging from the level heaven,
And vested with its liquid calm. (I, 32-33)¹¹

This illusion of a figure coming from heaven, following as it does the allusion to the disciples of Emmaus, provides an incontrovertible Christ parallel.

¹⁰For two other statements suggesting this same position, see Mardi, II, 18, 154.

¹¹For other parallels, see Clarel, I, 32, 134, 144, 177, 288.

This Christ imagery is brought to a climax in the passage describing Nehemiah's death ecstasy in terms of an apocalyptic vision. He sees the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, "clad like a bride in splendour brave," just as had been prophesied. He sees the jewelled streets, the crystal-clear water, and the "Fleece upon a throne." Nehemiah, man of faith, is given a share in the fruit of faith, Christ's resurrection, as in his dream (or mystic vision) he is welcomed into eternity:

And a great voice he hears which saith,
Pain is no more, no more is death;
I wipe away all tears: Come ye,
Enter, it is eternity.

.
. . . . In magic play
So to the meek one in the dream
Appeared the New Jerusalem:
Haven for which how many a day--
In bed, afoot, or on the knee--
He yearned: Would God I were in thee! (I, 326)

This, however, is but one facet of Nehemiah's total meaning. Counterbalancing this favorable imagery and allusion are a number of episodes which uncover Nehemiah as an ineffectual dreamer, a senile wanderer who is only half aware of the import of the faith he aimlessly preaches.¹² Frequently he is lost in his world of dreams, unaware of what goes on about him. As he discourses in his strange mystic way, he suddenly stops, unsure of his own message. Even as he pores over the Scriptures, he drowzes, blind to the import of what he reads:

If chance one interrupt, and ask--
What read you? he will turn a look
Which shows he knows not what he reads,
Or knowing, he but weary heeds,
Or scarce remembers (I, 119)

In offering his services to Clarel at their first meeting, he

¹²For examples of Nehemiah's senility, see Clarel, I, 35, 42, 135

makes it quite clear that he will act as guide but only in the measure that he himself is guided by Holy Writ. "'Me let be guide whose guide is this,'" he petitions, repeating his constant theme that the Bible is of all guides "the best" (I, 373-38).

Nehemiah's insistence upon the literal interpretation of Scripture succeeds only in imperiling the rightful position of the Bible. In an age whose most orthodox religious circles were beginning to accept the position that in matters of detail the Bible must be accepted symbolically rather than literally, this repudiation of the literal position is understandable. With Nehemiah's death, his "Book" is significantly referred to as "the Book now ownerless" (I, 330), and eventually, as one might expect, it finds its own grave in the grave of the Biblist (I, 331).¹³ It is, partially, Nehemiah's attitude toward the Scriptures which places him outside the pattern of the seeker for truth. In his role as prophet, he makes no attempt to free himself from preconceptions but rather seeks for parallels, for fulfillments of what he has already learned from his interpretation of Scripture.

Furthermore, Nehemiah's faith is lacking in intellectual content.¹⁴ As protagonist of the heart, he is unable to influence his companions because he is not equipped with that strong bone of

¹³This attitude toward the Bible seems far more liberal than the view delineated in the last chapter of The Confidence-Man. There the deliberate renunciation of the Bible is the last preparation for the total extinction of all faith. (See pp. 272-286; also p. lxxxvi). Once faith in Scripture has been cast aside, the powers of darkness are free to reign as they choose. In Clarel, however, the Bible is suggested to be one of many avenues to faith. Even though the "Book" is buried, the pilgrims continue their quest, still hopeful of finding an object to satisfy their desires. Although Mortmain's direct query, "The Bible, tell me, is it true?" (II, 29) goes unanswered, it is apparent that it is not true in Nehemiah's literal sense. What actual value the Bible has is never made clear.

¹⁴See Ch. III, sec. 3. 263-265.

thought which is necessary for the formation of convictions. His world is an over-simplified world in the same way that Margoth's is. His faith, based as it is on preconception rather than truth, does not provide answers for the problems of life but shuts out these problems as though they did not exist--as, indeed, for him they do not. It is perhaps in these terms that we may distinguish between real faith and fideism.

In Pierre, the narrator had commented, as tragedy struck the youthful hero, ". . . there is no faith, and no stoicism, and no philosophy, that a mortal man can possibly evoke which will stand the final test of a real impassioned onset of Life and Passion upon him For Faith and Philosophy are air, but events are brass" (p. 340). In Clarel, on the other hand, it is precisely a faith which can stand up before the onset of Life and Passion that is sought. This, no doubt, is one reason why the fideism of Nehemiah is repudiated: despite its personal depths of devotion, his faith is too narrow to face the full scope of life, and hence cannot stand firm against it. Bezanson sums up the problem nicely when he observes that, although Melville shows the deepest respect and compassion for Nehemiah's personal virtue, his response to life is outside the Melvillean pattern. His "happy conviction that all is well" is childish in terms of Melville's philosophy in which life was envisaged as an "endless warfare with evil."¹⁵

Although such a position as Nehemiah's may envisage itself as a bulwark against the encroaching floods of materialism, it is, in fact, but another source of peril. In setting up a set of false values under the nominal classification of faith, it succeeds only in bringing into disrepute that real faith which lies within the orbit

¹⁵Bezanson, Clarel, pp. 265-268.

of the full vision of truth.

3. The Object of Faith

The inadequacy of Nehemiah's fideistic assumptions, divorced as they are from any firm intellectual foundation, underscores the need for a clearly defined object of faith. Although such an object is the basis for many extended arguments in *Clarel*, no positive conclusion is reached.

The basic statement of the problem is made by Mortmain. As Derwent remonstrates with the Swede to give up his plan to remain alone in the desert, the latter replies:

"Thou man of God, nor desert here,
Nor Zin nor Obi yieldeth fear
If God but be--but be!" (I, 232)

This is the essence of Mortmain's quest--the bare existence of God.¹⁶ The nature of this supernatural being in whose existence he hopes so desperately is suggested by the narrator when he first describes Mortmain and outlines his past experiences:

That uncreated Good
He sought, whose absence is the cause
Of creeds and Atheists, mobs and laws. (I, 138)

These lines suggest two elements of the object of faith: it is both omnipotent and benevolent--an uncreated good. This passage is not only significant for Mortmain, but suggests an important shift in the problem of faith as it appears in Melville's works. Mortmain's problem is concerned with the existence of God rather than with His nature. He accepts as a basic premise the orthodox philosophical

¹⁶Later, in questioning Derwent, he presents a minor issue in asking, "'Is God an omnipresent God?'" (II, 28). This query is never answered nor is it reflected in the problems of the other pilgrims, and it seems to be no more than tangential to the main question.

concept of God as a supreme and benign being. This is a distinct change from the problems of preceding Melvillean heroes whose greatest doubt is not predominantly in the existence of God but in His benevolence. Babbalanja, Ahab, Pierre are all faced, in varying degrees, with the problem of tracing evil to its source, and they all suffer from the apprehension that such a quest can end only with the arraignment of the deity himself for the evil which he has, directly or indirectly, created. Chapter V, with its discussion of the sources of evil, has prepared us to some degree for this shift. There it was indicated that those characters who are preoccupied with the problem of evil (principally Mortmain and Ungar) tend to impute evil to man rather than God. Although there are minor putative suggestions of a malign deity, the main stream of thought in Clarel consistently places the problem of evil at man's door.¹⁷

Any attempt to delineate further the object of faith necessarily leads to creedal distinctions. Here, as in his earlier works, Melville indicates an impatience with doctrinal considerations.¹⁸ Such an attitude was implicit throughout Mardi. In one key passage Babbalanja praises the island of Serenia because he sees there the

¹⁷For the implications of a malign deity, see the evidence provided by Celio and Ungar in Ch. V. sec. 2.

¹⁸In Mardi, the rigid adherence to doctrine was one of the chief reasons for the condemnation of the island of Maramma. On the contrary, the island of Serenia is praised for devoting to acts of charity the time which on Maramma was spent in quibbling over matters of doctrine (II, 302-303). In Moby Dick, also, the pusillanimity of creedal distinctions is emphasized by Ishmael as he considers joining Queequeg in his pagan worship: "'How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth--pagans and all included--can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship? --to do the will of God--that is worship. And what is the will of God--to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man do to me--that is the will of God" (pp. 51-52).

fulfillment of the ancient words of Bardianna: "' . . . Let us do: let us act: While we fight over creeds, ten thousand fingers point to where vital good may be done. All round us, Want crawls to her lairs, and shivering, dies unrelieved'" (II, 303).

In Clarel the first suggestion of this attitude is found in the narrator's explanation of Mortmain's position previously quoted. The Swede sought a God whose "absence is the cause of creeds and Atheists, mobs and laws" (I, 188). According to these lines, it is the absence of God rather than His presence which is responsible for the establishment of various creeds.

The assertion that creed is a divisive factor which separates the Christian family into warring sects had been suggested earlier in the poem. Clarel, in an early canto, standing at the Holy Sepulchre and listening to the discord of "rival liturgies" produced by divergent sects, is, as a consequence, assailed by doubts concerning all religious truth, as he cries:

O, bickering family bereft,
Was feud the heritage He left? (I, 30)

It is Rolfe, however, with his wide-ranging speculative mind who expresses a general impatience with creedal distinctions. This may be partially explained in terms of his philosophy of time. As we have suggested in Chapter IV, Rolfe upholds a cyclical theory of history in which all things, including religious phenomena, move in recurring cycles. Looking upon various religious creeds, Rolfe sees many avatars--all historically true--of the one invisible and immortal God.¹⁹ In such a perspective, the external manifestations of faith are largely relative and, as a consequence, should be given but scant attention. They may be accepted and used but always in recog-

¹⁹See Ch. IV, sec. 7.

nition of their contingency.

Rolfe, while willing to uphold the beauty of primitive Christianity, has little faith in the changes which men have imposed on the original pattern. Men have imprinted their own wilful desires on the primitive ideal and so have distorted Christ's meaning. This is the burden of his discussion with Derwent as they wander through the desert:

What dream they knew, that primal band
Of gipsy Christians! But it died;
Back rolled the world's effacing tide:
The "world"--by Him denounced, defined--
Him first--set off and countersigned,
Once and for all, as opposite
To honest children of the light.
But worse came--creeds, wars, stakes. Oh, men
Made earth inhuman; yes, a den
Worse for Christ's coming, since His love
(Perverted) did but venom prove. (I, 254)

This attitude of Rolfe's is sometimes augmented into an inclusive skepticism. It is this which frightens Clarel as he listens to the older man's description of the Easter fire rite (II, 78-86). Again Rolfe concedes that the original practice stemmed from true devotion, but he is not slow to call the modern ceremony "fraud" (II, 82). Egged on by his subject, he soon has called all religions into disrepute, and Clarel is left with a sinking despair at the bleak picture Rolfe had painted:

. . . . Clarel knew decline
Of all his spirits, as may one
Who hears some story of his line
Which shows him half his house undone.
Revulsion came: with lifted brows
He gazed on Rolfe: is this the man
Whom Jordan heard in part espouse
The appeal of that Dominican
And Rome? and here, all sects, behold,
All creeds involving in one fold
Of doubt? Better a partisan! (II, 85)

The last line of this passage is of particular significance not only for the position of the hero but for the theme as a whole. Clarel,

unlike Rolfe, recognizing the conflict among many creeds does not repudiate all creed but indicates the need to choose among them. This attitude reinforces the conclusions suggested in Chapter III, that the heart alone is not sufficient to solve life's problems, but that the head also must be at work to provide some firm intellectual conviction.²⁰

It is in such an attitude that Clarel approaches Derwent who as a minister of faith should be able to indicate some lines of truth among the divergent creeds of nineteenth century Christianity. Clarel confides to the clergyman his religious doubts which are augmented by the conflicting doctrinal claims of divergent sects. Each of these separate churches seems like a drifting boat which, foundering in a storm, endangers not only itself but every vessel in its vicinity. To Derwent's unperturbed reply that there are always pilots who can be consulted, the hero replies that the pilots themselves often seem the most confused:

. . . . "Pilots retained?
But in debates which I recall
Such proved but naught. This side--that side,
They crossing hail through fogs that dwell
Upon a limitless deep tide,
While their own cutters toll the bell
Of groping." (II, 104)

Derwent begins to answer this piercing barb with one of his usual platitudes, but instead changes his tone and delivers a devastating conclusion:

"Not but there's here and there a heart
Which shares at whiles strange throbs alone.
Such at the freakish sting will start:
No umpirage! they cry--we dote
To dream heaven drops a casting vote,
In these perplexities takes part!" (II, 105)

Clarel is startled into silence by the reply. If Derwent's conclusion is to be taken literally then there is no such thing as religious truth, an intellectual claim, on which faith can be built.

²⁰ See Ch. III, sec. 3

4. The Roman Catholic Position

The necessity for devoting an entire section to the position of a single sect evolves from the emphasis given to Roman Catholicism in the poem itself. Among the many creeds alluded to in the text, the Roman position is the only one explored at length and it is the Roman position alone which provides any answer to the problems proposed by contemporary thought.

Although there are many exponents of Roman Catholicism throughout the poem (Celio, the Syrian monk, the monks of Mar Saba--particularly the Celibate--, Salvaterra), it is the Dominican friar whom the pilgrims encounter near the Jordan who provides our locus for a doctrinal consideration of the Catholic position.

The personal qualities of the Dominican make him an attractive figure. As the cavalcade comes upon him, the narrator comments:

Surprise they knew, yet made a stir
Of welcome, gazing on the man
In white robe of Dominican,
Of aspect strong, though cheek was spare,
Yellowed with tinge athlete may wear
Whom rigorous masters overtrain
When they with scourge of more and more
Would macerate him into power.
Inwrought herewith was yet the air
And open frontage frankly fair
Of one who'd moved in active scene
And swayed men where they most convene. (I, 272-273)

His ascetic cast, his alert, active demeanor which mark him as a man of affairs give him an air of poise and assurance which the pilgrims recognize. His cogent arguments are more than successful against the queries put to him.

Strangely enough, in view of what we have already seen of his position concerning creed, it is Rolfe who most strongly champions the Dominican. It is he who recognizes the Catholic understanding of human nature, the reason for the constant increase in her ranks, the

wisdom of maintaining a certain essential discipline (I, 281-282). Even Derwent is not unimpressed by the young friar who explains, without rancor and with an enviable intellectual precision, the Roman position. During the course of the conversation, the Dominican faces without hesitation or embarrassment the two problems of scientific materialism and political liberalism which had formed such a stumbling block to the faith of his contemporaries.

In dealing with the advances of science, he assumes a position of realism. He has no desire to bury himself in an outmoded civilization, but is happy to recognize the good of the present age. Science he sees as a good in so far as it operates within its proper sphere; the danger of science lies in its effort to bring everything under its dominion. The distinction he makes is clear:

" Science but deals
With Nature, Nature is not God;
Never she answer our appeals,
Of, if she do, but mocks the clod.

 Shall Science, then,
Which solely dealeth with this thing
Named Nature, shall she ever bring
One solitary hope to man?
'Tis Abba Father that we seek,
Not the artificer." (I, 275-276)²¹

To place all one's assurance in science is to place it vainly, for science deals only with physical reality and man has need of much more than this to solve his problems. It is God in His role as father who alone can provide for all the needs of His children. Thus, the Dominican implies that there is no essential conflict between science and religion, provided both are willing to abide by their proper boundaries.

In the area of political liberalism, the Dominican is equally

²¹There is a distinction made by the Syrian monk in dealing with God the Father and God as artificer. See Clarel, I, 343.

assured. Once again it is a moderate not a reactionary position which he upholds. He sees the need for political progress and makes no attempt to perpetuate an obsolete regime. Concerning the matter of human liberty, he asserts:

"Before the Church our human race
Stands equal. None attain to place
Therein through claim of birth or fee.
No monk so mean but he may dare
Aspire to sit in Peter's chair." (I, 273)

He himself has taken an active part in political progress. As a member of the Christian Democratic party he had once been elected to the legislative assembly to champion the cause of true liberty. To the incredulous glances of the pilgrims, he explains that there is no contradiction between the hierarchical organization of the Church of Rome and the ideal of political freedom. Here, once again, he makes a judicious distinction between "God's liberty for one and all" and "Satan's license" (I, 273). Liberty and anarchy are not synonymous terms, and it is against the latter that Rome raises her conservative bulwark.

The position assumed by the Dominican both in the realms of science and politics indicate an admission for the need of a changing order; yet, the pilgrims find this opposed to Rome's proud boast that she is unchanging. Once more the friar provides a useful distinction between the static and dynamic elements in the Roman structure: It is Rolfe who begins the discussion concerning change, remarking that "Things changing not when all things change need perish then" (I, 273). To this the Dominican replies that this is true of "things of human sort" and then continues his distinction:

". . . . Rome being fixed in form,
Unyielding there, how may she keep
Adjustment with new times? But deep
Below rigidities of form
The invisible nerves and tissues change

Adaptively. As men that range
 From clime to clime, from zone to zone
 (Say Russian hosts that menace Ind)
 Through all vicissitudes still find
 The body acclimate itself
 While form and function hold their own." (I, 275)

What remains static in the Church of Rome are the "rigidities of form" but this does not imply a petrification, for below the surface a vital and changing life goes on which adapts itself to new times and places.

It is precisely this fixity of form and doctrine which provides a rampart against doubt and confusion. As the pilgrims have already realized, doctrinal liberty can never strengthen the position of faith. The result of such liberty is the multiplication of sects which, weakened by their isolation, have no power to stem the encroachments of materialism. It is just such a position which Rolfe had envisioned when he described the final battle as a conflict between atheism and Roman Catholicism, with Protestantism being retained as "base of operations sly" by atheism (I, 282).²²

This same ascendancy of Rome is further emphasized in the concluding warning of the Dominican:

" Ere I go
 Yet one word more; and bear with me:
 Whatever your belief may be--
 If well ye wish to human kind,
 Be not so mad, unblest, and blind
 As, in such days as these, to try
 To pull down Rome. If Rome could fall

²²In another place Rolfe describes Protestantism in even more unfavorable terms:

But in her Protestant repose
 Snores faith toward her mortal close?
 Nay, like a sachem petrified,
 Encaved found in the mountain-side
 Perfect in feature, true in limb,
 Life's full similitude in him,
 Yet all mere stone--is faith dead now,
 A petrification? (II, 22)

'Twould not be Rome alone, but all
 Religion. All with Rome have tie,
 Even the railers which deny,
 All but the downright Anarchist,
 Christ-hater, Red, and Vitriolist." (I, 276)

Such, in effect, is the Catholic position as it is delineated by the Dominican friar. While it may be true, as Griffith suggests, that William Sedgwick overstates the case in speaking of Melville's strong bias in favor of the Church of Rome, it must be admitted that in Clarel, at least, the position of Roman Catholicism comes off very well indeed.²³ Certainly it is a far cry from the violent denunciation of Catholicism in Mardi, and it does seem to represent the most positive aspect of the struggle for faith in the contemporary world.²⁴

So vague and tenuous are the allusions to faith throughout the poem that a consideration of the theme must leave the explicator far from satisfied. One is forced into a peripheral approach, hoping that by exploring the obstacles to faith, the contemporary attitudes toward it, and the response of organized Christianity, one may arrive at what precisely Melville meant by the term. The most we can say with certainty is that for the author of Clarel, faith meant an adherence to a spiritual and ethical order which had its origins in a personal and benevolent God. Scientific materialism, political liberalism, exaggerated fideism, multiplicity of sects--all form obstacles to the man seeking faith.

The problem as it is presented in Clarel seems to be largely a

²³See Griffith, p. 359; Sedgwick, p. 214; Braswell, pp. 112-113.

²⁴In Mardi, denunciation of Catholicism is found in the description of Maramma with its hideous death penalty for all who deviate from orthodoxy, its cruel and superstitious Priest-King, its blind and avaricious guide Pani (II, ii, iv, ix, xli).

psychological rather than a metaphysical one. Here there is not so much the question of establishing an ontological reality as of maintaining a belief in such a reality in the midst of a hostile world. What seems to terrorize such pilgrims as Mortmain, Ungar, and Clarel himself is that the pressure of the age in which they live may make it impossible for them to find or to maintain a firm belief in the spiritual values which they believe to exist. It is the sterile air of Jerusalem which makes the lamps at the Holy Sepulchre burn so dimly. A faith which is victorious over these obstacles emerges as a possibility, however, and the whole tone of this theme suggests a train of thought which is leading toward an acceptance of conventional spiritual values. What precisely this indicates for the total meaning of Clarel will be discussed at length in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

It was in the spring of 1876 that Herman Melville, with the financial help of his maternal uncle, Peter Gansvoort, offered to the public, Clarel: a Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land. The fact that no publisher would assume the responsibility for these six hundred thirty pages of tetrameter couplets is a foreshadowing of the poem's whole history. The limited edition of 1876 was in no great demand, and no other edition appeared until 1924, when Constable & Co. undertook a complete edition of Melville's works. Despite the numerous editions of Melville appearing in the last few years, Clarel remains, even now, surprisingly inaccessible.¹

Reasons for this continued lack of interest are not hard to find, and even the author conceded that it was a piece "eminently adapted for unpopularity."² Yet even though Melville could thus cavalierly dismiss its reception, Clarel had been sufficiently important to him to demand his time and energy over a period of some twenty years. The doom pronounced by the author himself is one which his critics have felt little trouble in accepting. The poem as poem fails. It fails primarily in its choice and manipulation of verse form and in its creation and organization of symbols. And yet precisely because it falls in time between those two classics, Moby Dick and Billy Budd, and because it is the work of the same symbolic mind which created these novels, Clarel is a poem which it would be imprudent to dismiss

¹The new Hendricks-House edition of Melville's works will include a critical edition of Clarel edited by Walter Bezanson.

²This statement occurs in a letter to James Billson, dated October 10, 1884, eight years after the publication of Clarel. This is not, then, a purely conjectural comment but the utterance of an author who could bolster his statement by contemporary reviews.

On the subject of Melville's contemporary reputation, see the unpublished dissertation of H. W. Hetherington, The Reputation of Herman Melville in America (University of Michigan, 1933).

too lightly. While one must concede that the meanings of the poem come through only obscurely, one must also concede that such meanings, obtuse though they be, are our only handle to Melville's thought in those "silent years" which followed the pessimism of The Confidence Man and preceded the "acceptance" of Billy Budd.

The specific impulse for the poem came undoubtedly from his own trip to the Holy Land which he had undertaken in the fall and winter of 1856-1857. His journal records with bleak pathos his own disappointment at beholding at first hand the sterility and decay of the land which he had hoped would retain a spark of vital Christianity. "No country will more quickly dissipate romantic expectations than Palestine--particularly Jerusalem," he wrote.³ This is the dull landscape which he chooses as the background for his long narrative poem. Unwilling to build solely on his own impressions, however, he read widely in contemporary travel literature, bolstering his own first-hand information with the studies of such travelers as Dean Stanley, Edward Palmer, and William Thomson.⁴

The narrative elements of the poem can be easily summarized. Clarel, a young American student of theology, comes to Jerusalem on what was in nineteenth century America a commonplace sight-seeing tour. While in the Holy City he meets the aged Evangelist, Nehemiah, and through him, the American expatriot, Nathan, and his wife and daughter, Agar and Ruth. Following Nathan's death, Clarel, despite his love for Ruth, decides to join a pilgrimage journeying through the Holy Land. Parts II, III, and IV of the poem are concerned with the events of this pilgrimage. Before the return to Jerusalem, some

³Journal up the Straits, p. 154.

⁴On the problem of Melville's reading in conjunction with Clarel, see Bezanson, Clarel, Chs. I and III.

of the pilgrims desert the cavalcade, two of them die, and Clarel determines to marry Ruth only to find as he re-enters the city that both Agar and Ruth are dead. Inconsolable, he watches the other pilgrims journey homeward, while he chooses to remain in Jerusalem. Such a summary of the narrative suggests that the poem is preeminently a tale of young love, but actually Clarel is no more a story of romantic love than was Taji's wild search for Yillah. Perhaps the very word narrative is misleading in connection with Clarel since the narrative element is so slight as to be no more than a kind of scaffolding which the poem needs in order to hold it together; such an external prop never penetrates deeply in the construction of meanings. The poem is not so much narrative as reflective--a kind of large speculation about the subjects which the confused consciousness of the nineteenth century never ceased debating: faith, creed, suffering, immortality, progress.

Enclosed within the narrative scaffolding lie the symbolic meanings of the poem. Its hero is a kind of American Adam, the young innocent approaching his trial or the quester engaged in his search. In some ways he is brother to Melville's Captain Delano, also the innocent American brought unaware and unprepared into the presence of evil. Both Clarel and Delano manifest a temperamental hesitancy and an inability to make sharp decisions. Despite this generic likeness in character, however, Clarel shows himself far more perceptive than the captain of the Bachelor's Delight. Further, the situations which the two characters face are in marked contrast. In Benito Cereno the captain confronts an actual concrete situation of good and evil; in Clarel, the hero confronts not the experience but the abstract problem of evil.

It is here that Melville must have been faced with his first and

greatest artistic decision. Should he symbolize the quest? Should he create, as in Moby Dick and Mardi, a whale or woman or what you will in which to embody his quest for spiritual answers. Had the answer been a strong "yes," we could have hoped for a more successful artistic creation, a stronger symbolic narrative. The answer, however, seems to have been a hesitant "no." As a result, the symbolic process is incomplete both because the symbol lacks vitality and because it operates only on the level of a device to enclose the bulk of argumentation of which the poem is mainly composed.

The physical journey through the Holy Land is the symbol of a journey in quest of spiritual values. Yet the long debates of the pilgrims are carried on by direct exposition, and even when these debates are enclosed within a topographical symbol, the literal and symbolic levels lie so close together that the symbol no longer functions validly as a level of meaning. Perhaps, however, this is not pure loss, for Melville in making his choice must have felt that it was less important to provide a symbolic narrative than to retain the large body of abstract speculations which would have been impossible in a more symbolic poem. It is this which justifies a definition of Clarel as a long speculative poem.

Clarel we may assume to be the contemporary American consciousness seeking truth.⁵ Clarel's goal is an encompassing answer which will provide for such apparently conflicting values as science and faith, materialism and spiritual values, asceticism and the natural life, good and evil--all within the framework of truth. He wishes to find an answer which will provide for the harmonious ordering of

⁵It is interesting to note that of the seven most important pilgrims (Nehemiah, Rolfe, Vine, Ungar, Clarel, Mortmain, Derwent), only the latter two are not Americans.

all the disparate elements of human life. Clarel perceives within his mind the dangerous reefs of doubt showing through the shallow waters of faith. Determined to face these "underformings in the mind" before he is totally wrecked upon them, he, like so many other Melvillean heroes, embarks upon a journey. Leaving his less perceptive countrymen to enjoy their weak theology and provincial forms, he turns his face away from all known values to face alone and without preconception the problems of doubt which beset him.

The choice of his destination was determined by the fact that Palestine was the cradle of Christianity, and so, there, if any place, should the Christian seeker be able to confront basic Christian values and to see the full vision of Christian truth. Clarel's motivation separates him from the conventional traveler of the nineteenth century who made his trip to the Holy Land as an orthodox pilgrim attesting by his pious devotion his faith in Christianity.⁶ Clarel sets out not to venerate but to test. Although it is obvious throughout the poem that his deepest desire is to find proof in favor of the Christian religion, nevertheless, his explicit purpose is simply to see the truth and give testimony of it.

For Melville, truth was a word of the largest possible implications. To see the truth was to see the harmonious ordering of total cosmic experience. Through truth the opacity of daily events was made luminously intelligible to the perceiving mind. This is why Melville employs the quest for truth as the organizing control for the whole poem. It is fitting then that Clarel as hero asks the two questions which may be considered as handles for the central meaning

⁶For the contemporary attitude toward the Holy Land, see Bezanson, Clarel, pp. 12-13.

of the poem. "What may man know?" he first queries, and later adds, "Whose the eye that sees aright if any?" In these two questions are subsumed the entire meaning of the poem, and, indeed, we may say, of the meaning of most of Melville's major work. What Clarel asks is, in fact: what kind of man will perceive the vision of truth, and, of what will such a vision consist? Melville's speculation on these questions in the years between Ahab's failure and Billy Budd's success is of major significance in the progress of his thought.

Despite--or perhaps because of--the importance of Clarel in the pattern of Melville's thought, the poem should be approached with two precautions: first, whatever may be said of the quality of its speculations, it fails as a poem; secondly, its meanings are far from being clearly articulated, and the task of determining its values (the meanings of faith, immortality, suffering, time, progress) must be approached with a perspecacity which will probe beneath the surface of the deceptively simple dialogue.

Clarel, as poem, can be satisfactorily dismissed with the statement that it is a poem manque. Its two volumes of over three hundred pages each must be accounted an artistic failure. It fails both in the manipulation of its symbols and of its verse form. Despite the intermittent praise of such critics as W. H. Auden and W. B. Stein, Melville's poetry has generally evoked little interest and less commendation.⁷ Even the admirers mentioned above are painstakingly careful to indicate that their approbation limits itself to only a segment of the body of Melville's verse. Clarel is no

⁷For some recent estimates of Melville's verse, see Newton Arvin, "Melville's Shorter Poems," Partisan Review, XVI (1949), 1034-1046; Laurence Barrett, "Differences in Melville's Verse," PMLA, 70 (1955), 606-623; Robert Penn Warren, "Melville the Poet," Kenyon Review, VIII (1946), 208-223.

exception to this general condemnation, and when an occasional critic such as H. W. Wells attempts to salvage this poem, his indiscreet enthusiasm succeeds only in embarrassing Melville's more judicious critics. To indicate that in Clarel we would have with a little compression another Wasteland, or that we are reminded throughout of the Divine Comedy, does little to improve the reputation of Clarel.⁸

The wild turbulence of much of Melville's prose should have been a warning to him that he would not be at home in the narrow rigid enclosure of the tetrameter couplet. Perhaps he felt that his own impatience with established form might be quieted were he to commit himself irrevocably to a conventional pattern. This is the explanation given by William Sedgwick who writes:

The choice of this metrical form seems madness at first sight; yet there is a deep-seated logic in the very fact that it was antithetical to Melville's most characteristic prose. By reversing his perspectives Melville had jacked himself above the chaotic eddies and fluidities which had engulfed him in Pierre. . . . The form of expression in Clarel was a prop or support to his new state of consciousness in which his spontaneous ego no longer played an all-commanding role.⁹

It is quite true that Melville's verses settle themselves within the confines staked out for them. They are patient, cautious, and lifeless. Here is the aesthetic tragedy. We are reminded of some great dog whipped into subjection, walking hopelessly in his narrow pen.¹⁰ Here we are at the very opposite pole from Pierre where the artistic control is paralyzed by the terror of what is being said. In Pierre,

⁸See H. W. Wells, "Melville's Clarel," College English IV (1942), 478-483.

⁹Sedgwick, Tragedy of Mind, p. 202.

¹⁰It is difficult to understand how H. W. Wells can seriously comment: "His verse is never elegant, unctuous or soft but is toughly imaginative, like the best verse of Emily Dickinson, Emerson, and Thoreau." "Melville's Clarel," p. 480.

aesthetic distance disappears, and in place of a novel we have the unguided lashing and bludgeonings of an author who no longer controls his material. Perhaps it is in the hope that the use of technical devices will provide a firm control against his own emotions that Melville chooses the couplet form. Unfortunately, he is not sufficiently a verse craftsman to exploit his pattern, and as in Pierre he became the slave of his own emotional responses, in Clarel he becomes the slave of his medium which instead of informing his material acts only as an envelope to enclose it.

Yet had Melville been capable of far more adroit management, it is questionable whether the couplet would have suited his need. Even in the hands of a skilled versifier it admits but slight variation, and its insistent rhythm would be difficult to withstand for over six hundred pages. An even deeper objection concerns itself with the mating of this form with the material which Melville was to explore. Were the subject capable of a brisk, ironic treatment, possibly the couplet would have met the need; but Clarel is concerned with darkness, sterility, quest, and loneliness. Such themes would seem to need a line which would allow a certain expansion and development by paragraph rather than by the small unit of the couplet. Lacking the ability to manage his lines, Melville generally enforces their monotonous regularity rather than alleviating it.

The lines, furthermore, are small and cramped. Melville has set up a giant canvas and attempts to cover it with the tools of the water color artist. One feels that the artist's hand, used to the wide, heavy strokes of the oil brush, persists with great weariness in his appointed task. The wonderful massing of light and shade so prevalent in Moby Dick is missing in Clarel. The great bulk of the whale poised against the linear figures aboard the Pequod provides a contrast which

nothing in Clarel is capable of suggesting. There is no contrast; there are no peaks--everything is on the same monotonous level.

Melville's choice of verse form, however, does not entirely account for the failure of Clarel.¹¹ The failure is not only one of metrical form but also of symbol. James Baird is not alone in evaluating Melville as a symbolist of unusual stature. His ability to abstract from the symbol, to create, as with the white whale, a symbol of manifold meanings is his unique artistic gift.¹² Even in Mardi (which we may hardly deem a successful novel) this symbolic imagination may be perceived despite the clutter of language which often impedes its realization. But Mardi was but a youthful exploration, valuable as heralding Moby Dick rather than for any intrinsic value of its own. But coming to Clarel, Melville commits a strange sort of blunder. He turns to the established symbolism of Christianity and employs it as it stands. Jerusalem, the Sepulchre, the Jordan, the Desert, the Christian cross--all, without refurbishing, are made the furniture of his poem. Jerusalem had long been symbolic as the city of redemption, the holy city of peace, the promise and type of the heavenly city of eternity. In the Middle Ages it was thought to represent the center of the world, so that a man standing in Jerusalem is standing at the very core of human activity. Yet by the nineteenth century this rich symbolic heritage had become a worn-out conventional symbol, capable, at best, of figuring as a kind of

¹¹Walter Bezanson provides an interesting study of Melville's interest in versecraft and in particular of Arnold's influence on him. Bezanson suggests especially that Melville's marginalia indicates his profound admiration for Arnold's "Resignation." He then raises the possibility that this poem, written in rhyming couplets of iambic tetrameter, may have provided the model for Clarel.

Walter Bezanson, "Melville's Reading of Arnold's Verse." PMLA 69 (1954), 365-391.

¹²Baird, Ishmael, pp. xii, xv, 188-189.

wooden allegory. In such a case, the poet who is content merely to reiterate such symbols without modulating them into a new tonality dooms himself to failure. Perhaps the deep sense of anguish which was the fruit of Melville's journey to the Holy Places invested them with a significance which blinded him to their symbolic inadequacy. As the poem stands, however, its topographical symbolism is a sadly static machinery and no more.

It is true that Melville subjects this machinery to a peculiarly Melvillean focus--a duality of reality and appearance--but although this does amplify and deepen the meaning, it does so by a kind of imposed manipulation instead of by organic generation. This dual focus suggests that behind each appearance lies an antithetical reality: thus, within the desert waste will be found life and revelation, the green oasis with its pleasant water is actually a temptation, the walls of Jerusalem do not exclude danger but hem in the sins and weaknesses of the inhabitants. Such duality provides an ambiguity typical of Melville, but does little to vitalize his symbols.

James Baird aptly suggests that the search for new symbols is always elicited by the awareness of the failure of a mode of sentience. Man, recognizing that the forms which had formerly expressed his perceptions are no longer capable of doing so, seeks almost unconsciously for new forms.¹³ It seems artistically inexplicable that Melville even as he wrote of the tragic waning of the Christian experience should choose as a mode of expression the tired symbols of conventional Christianity.¹⁴ The strangeness of his

¹³Ibid., pp. 192-193.

¹⁴This statement, however, does not mean to suggest that here Melville is progressing further away from Christian values but rather that while being drawn more fully to the primitive ideal of such values, he is faced with the waning of these elements within the realm of his practical human experience.

choice is augmented when we consider his vast store of primitive lore from which he could so easily have drawn his symbols. Yet only once throughout the poem does he modulate his conventional Christian symbol by immersing it in non-Christian religious beliefs. The episode in which this occurs is of sufficient importance to detain us for a moment, since it indicates more clearly than any generalization the mode of Melville's failure, and the means by which the poem's symbolic quality could have been vitalized.

The episode referred to is the death of Mortmain beneath the mystic palm. Since the Christian cross is a repeated image in Clarel, and since there is an implicit relationship between the sufferings of Mortmain and the suffering of Christ, one would expect that Mortmain would meet his death beneath a cross. If he had, the canto would have taken its undistinguished place beside the others; as it is, Melville succeeds, symbolically at least, in raising these cantos to a unique stature. Mortmain dies beneath a palm tree, and with this change of symbol, Melville achieves an arresting cosmic vision. The palm tree becomes a manifold symbol. It includes the note of the Christian cross, but also the idea of resurrection (which palm signified to the Jews and early Christians); further, it reaches beyond the Judaic-Christian tradition to include the Buddhist triumph beneath the Bo-Tree, and the Maori concept that the bridge to eternity was constructed of a bent tree. In these few cantos (II, xxviii, xxxii) Melville's symbolic imagination revitalizes the Christian commonplaces which had imprisoned him and succeeds in creating a symbol of multiple significance.

Yet the symbolic failure of Clarel is not only the failure to revitalize smaller symbolic elements but far more the failure to provide a successful symbol for the focus of the poem itself. This

we have already suggested in classifying the physical quest as an inadequate symbol lying too close to the literal level of the poem. James Baird in analyzing the failure of Mardi comments that the interrelationship of the materials is always crude, so that the structure, as symbol, tends to spring apart and lie in fragments.¹⁵ One may press the same charge against Clarel. Melville provides no adequate symbol for the quest itself which is the organizing theme of the poem. The quest is stated in terms of abstraction. The questers are forced to seek for a metaphysical reality abstractly stated. Such a scheme is totally foreign to the activity of Melville's symbolic imagination, and one cannot be surprised that he achieves so small a success. Whatever the shadowy and bizarre meanings of Yillah, she was, at least, a dramatic conception capable of eliciting multiple reactions. Although one must admit that in Mardi the literal and symbolic levels are not equally manipulated, at least one sees a powerful imagination intent on wielding two levels of meaning into a single focus. Moby Dick is the successful culmination of that initial effort. Here at every juncture symbol and reality are one. The whale is whale; the Pequod is ship. Both have their vast bulk of actual weight. Moby Dick never ceases to be whale even while he is infinitely more. It is in these terms that we find one of the major causes of the failure of Clarel. Two levels of meaning are never established. We must be satisfied with the dry bread of speculation even while in some confused way we are led to anticipate a symbolic feast.

While all of the preceding criticism falls specifically under the heading of formal evaluation, it is true, nevertheless, that the form of a poem is nothing else but its idea and meaning in action.

¹⁵Baird, Ishmael, p. 193.

Thus, Clarel's symbolic failure impinges necessarily upon its semantic clarity so that its imposed symbols only increase the opacity of the themes. Total meaning in Clarel is not easy to come by, although this is not immediately evident because of the deceptive simplicity of the dialogue. Although in Melville's best novels, multiple meaning and ambiguity are directly perceived, in the poem the poor level of the verse invests the statement with a childish banality. Initial explication suggests that the meanings are all very simple, and it is not until the explicator attempts a synthesis that he begins to realize the complexities of the task before him.

Ambiguity is a character of all Melville's works, but although in Moby Dick the great currents and counter-currents are universally acclaimed as a sign of genius, in Clarel ambiguity becomes another mark of artistic failure. The ambiguity appears in greater relief because of Melville's rigid and unimaginative use of his verse form. In the novels one feels that flexibility of form is in harmony with the ambiguities of meaning. This is especially true in Moby Dick with its switch from dramatic dialogue and soliloquy to first and third person narration and exposition. This ability to escape from the narrow confines of mechanic form is, of course, one of the most successful achievements of the novel which thereby gains in the inclusiveness which prepares us for the manifold symbolism of the whale. In Clarel, however, Melville commits himself to a mechanic form, and yet does not succeed in employing it as a control of his meaning. The form in no way controls the subject. They wander along together, awkwardly out of step, never exerting any appreciable influence upon each other.

Although the vastness of Moby Dick refuses to be neatly packaged, it is a comfort to the analyst to find that the story is at least

implicitly controlled by the sensibility of Ishmael as narrator. Clarel lacks such an organizing sensibility. Clarel is the hero of the piece, it is true, but we must be careful not to invest him with a larger role than Melville designates. As hero, he is passive rather than active, a sounding board rather than an active agent. His attitudes and postures need not represent the ideal quester. It is necessary, therefore, before seeing the possible answers to Clarel's two questions, "What may man know" and "Whose the eye that sees aright, if any," to set up some criteria for evaluating the response and attitudes of the hero as well as of the other major figures.

In Clarel, we are faced with a great dialectic which is not played out against a clearly established normative background. The speeches of the characters measure and criticize each other but with no consistently operative normative voice to award the prize. The expository comment made by such a narrative voice is, for any piece of imaginative narrative, one of the most valuable means by which to determine the value and meaning of the actions and speeches of the characters. In Clarel, such expository comment is at a minimum. What Melville gives us here is something close to a morality play with its spare and uninterpreted dialogue. There is, however, this essential difference: the morality play could count on its audience for its interpretive sensibility; Melville lacked this advantage, for his audience had no communal sensibility on which he could depend. We need no more than a glance at Melville criticism to recognize the principle of private interpretation at work.

The lack of normative voice may be explained largely in terms of the basic exploratory quality of Melville's mind. He had an aptitude for conjecture and speculation, for the kind of putative argumentation which is engaged in merely as a means of enlarging one's mental

boundaries, never with the finality of personal conviction. Thus, through the devices of his various characters, Melville explores with a kind of probing calculation the possible attitudes of the nineteenth century consciousness. The dramatis personae suggest a continuum stretching from the scientific materialism of Margoth the geologist to the pious fideism of Nehemiah the Evangelist. While the extremes are defined and evaluated almost in terms of caricature, the large central bulk of characters receives no consistent evaluation. While their speeches balance, enlarge, and contradict each other, there is no positive criterion for establishing a normative focus, and as a result the reader is left with a kind of shifting kaleidoscope in which each fresh view reveals new arrangements of the pieces.

Since it is clear that the meanings of the poem are not controlled by a constantly operative narrative voice, it is tempting to look to the person of the hero who may, in terms of the values which he offers, indicate the pattern into which the values of the other characters may fall. As we have indicated before, however, Clarel is a unique kind of hero who is less an interpreter of values than a sounding board for them. Clarel seems to indicate not a final evaluation but only one more shift of the kaleidoscope. This statement is reenforced by the fact that on the few sporadic occasions when a narratory voice does operate it opposes rather than enforces the values represented by the protagonist.

There are three junctures in the poem at which such a phenomenon occurs. The first two may be cited as subsidiary evidence preparing for the third and critical episode. The first instance (I, 192) of this opposition between the narrative voice and the action of the hero occurs when Clarel turns aside from the proffered friendship of Celio, and the narrator comments sadly on his inability to respond to human

relationships. The second instance (I, 44) is Clarel's inability to converse with the wordly young Greek, Glaucon, which is interpreted by the narrator as an unhealthy predominance of head over heart. The third and most important episode (II, 285-287) is the death of Ruth. There we see that the fierce pessimism elicited from Clarel by the death of Ruth is not the final value to be placed on the episode. Clarel, upon seeing the bodies of Ruth and Agar, is moved by his grief to a total repudiation of spiritual values. Faced with the final separation from one in whom he had found a return of his love, he can do nothing but condemn whatever forces have produced this tragedy. God is denounced, and Clarel plunges into a terrible despair. In the interpolated lyric which follows, however, we are confronted with a narrative voice which runs counter to the wild ravings of the hero. The lyric itself suggests hope rather than despair, and indicates that Clarel's attitude, although understandable, is not to be taken as the basic value of the poem. The fourth instance of this phenomenon occurs in the Epilogue, but an investigation of this point is reserved for a later section in which the whole meaning of the Epilogue will be discussed.

Bearing in mind the dangers of interpretation proceeding from a lack of any constant normative voice, and from the ambiguous position of the hero, we may approach the questions which we suggested earlier may act as a focus for the poem. Clarel poses his first question following a discussion of the difficulty of arriving at truth. "Whose the eye that sees aright if any?" he queries more to himself than to the other pilgrims. His second question occurs as he ponders the impossibility of pulling the vastness of the world into a settled system. So much escapes, so much remains imponderable--"What may man know?" Before presuming to find answers to these two problems, it is

essential to indicate the basic assumption on which these questions are based. Despite their apparent skepticism, they suggest a belief in the existence of truth. This is an obvious advance from the epistemological nihilism of Pierre and The Confidence-Man. Although in Clarel not all men (indeed very few) attain the full vision of truth, nevertheless, the entire quest theme suggests the possibility of such a vision, and concerns itself not with establishing criteria for absolute values but with the defects within the perceiving intellect which limit the capacity for vision. Among such defects are preconceptions, and over-simplified viewpoint, a desire for sensual comfort, eclecticism, passivity. Thus the Greeks desert the pilgrimage because of the difficulty and ugliness of the journey; Margoth and Derwent narrow everything to an over-simplified focus; Vine waits passively, unwilling to commit himself to any conviction; Nehemiah sees everything in terms of his Biblical preconceptions, and Rolfe, unwilling to restrict the probings of his mind, gives allegiance to one set of values after another. Very few of the characters in Clarel will make the sacrifices necessary to enable them to see clearly.

With this emphasis upon man's capacity for truth rather than on the existence of truth, the problem becomes psychological rather than metaphysical. In this light, it is easy to understand why so much time is given to a consideration of the necessary qualities of the successful seeker. The ability to see "aright" demands constant renunciation. Such a man must be a true ascetic: a man of the stature of Bulkington who is willing to forsake all comforts, all known and ordinary values to launch into a world of desert, of loneliness, of suffering--for only in such a world will he be prepared for the vision of truth. He must be neither a sentimental optimist (Nehemiah)

nor a cynical pessimist (Ungar). He must be able to think deeply and willingly face his own dark thoughts. He must also have the power of the heart--the power to desire, to give himself totally to a cause.

He must, therefore, be a man who is capable of both thinking and feeling and of engaging in both activities simultaneously. To devote oneself to a cause, blindly, upon an impulse of the heart, without bothering to test the validity of the cause is not the attitude of the real seeker of truth. Such an attitude Melville had early satirized in Mardi as he describes the foolish adoration of the blind man worshipping false idols. While it is not possible for the quester to know ahead of time the qualities of the object sought--conscious ignorance is in a sense a necessary requisite of his search--still he must desire an object which will satisfy not only his heart but also his head, since truth is the proper object of the intellect and cannot, therefore, be inimical to it.¹⁶ This, essentially, is what Melville means by the term, used as early as Mardi, the "full-developed man."

The eye that sees aright is also the eye that has looked on pain without shrinking. The inevitable fact of suffering and sin is both part of the quester's vision, and part of the experience through which he must pass in order to achieve his vision. In Clarel, as throughout Melville's work, there is a steady adherence to the fact of evil and pain. No transcendentalism could convince Melville against the testimony of his eyes and heart that these things were but chimeras. Suffering--both physical and spiritual--was a fact and was to be faced as such. To "live in the all"--Goethe's phrase--did not lessen the pain of a toothache, and to maintain that evil was in

¹⁶See Melville's letter to Hawthorne and "Hawthorne and his Mosses," quoted in Thorpe, pp. 392 and 341.

the eye of the beholder did not destroy sin.¹⁷

The attitude toward suffering in Clarel suggests an evaluation different from anything suggested in the earlier novels. While Melville had always been preoccupied with this question, he was generally concerned not so much with its effects as with its origin. Who is responsible for suffering? was the question, explicit or implicit, in Mardi, Moby Dick, Pierre, and The Confidence-Man. In Clarel, however, he picks up a statement uttered in Pierre and makes of it a basic theme of the poem. In the earlier novel the narrator had remarked, "Grief is the chamberlain to knowledge" (p. 199). This casual remark is expanded in Clarel to a kind of psychology of suffering. The futility of suffering, seen in The Confidence-Man, is repudiated in favor of a new outlook which indicates that the man who has suffered will be prepared according to the measure of his pain for the full vision of truth. It is those who have suffered the most (Mortmain, Celio, Agath, Ungar) who are capable of seeing most fully into the mystery of life. The lines preceding Mortmain's death provide the most important locus for this:

Indeed each wakeful night and fast
(That feeds and keeps what clay would clutch)
With thrills which he did still outlast,
His fibres made so fine in end
That though in trials fate can lend
Firm to withstand, strong to contend;
Sensitive he to a spirit's touch. (II, 137)

Mortmain's loneliness, his mental anguish, his vigils and other imposed austerities have made his spirit marvelously alert so that he can apprehend essentially what the others (Vine, Rolfe, Derwent, the Lesbian) see only as appearance. There is no question here of suffering seen only as a punishment for sin. Melville indicates quite

¹⁷See Chapter V, section 1 of this dissertation.

clearly through the frequent use of the Christ symbol that pain is the portion of the just as well as the unjust. Here, the worthless anguish endured in The Confidence-Man is repudiated in favor of a pain which is, for the man strong enough to bear it, of incomparable value.

Such suffering is of two kinds. It may have its origin in physical pain as with Celio, the young Italian hunchback. It may have its origin in the spiritual pain of disillusionment as with Mortmain. In either case, both body and soul are eventually involved and the physical pain becomes a subordinate element to the far deeper anguish of the human spirit. Primarily, the suffering with which Melville is here concerned seems to be that of isolation. For Melville, isolation was a basic element of human experience. "We are our own worlds," he had declared in Mardi (II, 279), and this position he never repudiated. But in Clarel, a further isolation is added to the ineluctable loneliness of the human spirit. Such withdrawal may be the consequence of a shy, reserved temperament which, in an excess of sensitivity, deliberately withdraws from the community of men; it may be a withdrawal caused by circumstances, or it may be a deliberate isolation undertaken by those courageous souls who recognize that only the man free in soul can be faithful to the quest for truth. Thus, Vine withdraws through fear of suffering, Agath because the circumstances of his life have cut him off from normal experience, and Mortmain and Celio because they realize the necessity for spiritual isolation in order to reach their goal. Clarel himself, although aware that the quest demands an isolation from the known values of his homeland, does not immediately recognize that the quest may also demand a far more painful renunciation of human love. This is a viewpoint into which he is gradually initiated

throughout the poem, until in the final cantos he is forced to choose between the asceticism of the Franciscan Salvaterra and the human devotion of Ruth.

The preceding pages provide a summation of the evidence for the question, "Whose the eye that sees aright if any." The quester who will see things as they are, who will be trusted with a vision of the truth, will be a dedicated soul, one endowed with a keen mind and a warm heart, a man who will not shrink from the sufferings imposed upon him and will even, if it seems necessary, enter into a deep and painful isolation in order to be free from every impediment to truth.

Only two men of this elevated stature emerge from the poem: Celio and Mortmain. Celio is cut off by death from the successful accomplishment of his quest. Mortmain succeeds. It is to the "mad Swede" then that we must look for the answer to the second question, "What may man know?" Mortmain has been impelled upon his quest by his disillusionment with mankind: his immediate family, his intimate friends, his political allies have all in some measure betrayed him. Mortmain never articulates the object of his mysterious quest. One can come upon it only obliquely by observing his increasing restlessness, his passionate need for solitude, for a fanatical austerity of life, and by the tenor of his thoughts which are always concerned with the deep "mystery of iniquity"--the pattern behind the cosmic sin and anguish which is man's allotted bread.

What answer does Mortmain's vision provide? This is never explicitly stated and one must again "by indirections seek directions out." We are told less about what he sees than about the effect of what he sees. In a second, the turbulent violence of the madman is changed to a gentle tranquillity. In place of restlessness is peace; in place of bitterness, gentleness. For the first time in the poem,

Mortmain's mouth is free of invectives, and the lovely lyric invocation which he addresses to the mystic palm is itself the clearest indication of what his vision has meant to him. What Mortmain sees is enough to provide the first real peace of his whole life. That such a vision must have had a profound depth cannot be doubted since the profound restlessness of Mortmain's spirit could not have been stilled by any superficial assurance. It seems safe to assume, then, that as he watched beneath the mystic palm he apprehended at last the full pattern of human existence. All the disordered pieces of his experience spring into shape and he sees that the jagged edge of human anguish fits harmoniously into the total scheme. With this realization, his quest comes to an end and he slips from vision into death.

Surely this is the only explanation of that sudden peace which follows so hard upon his frenzied searching. Though some of the pilgrims, such as Derwent and Rolfe, seem satisfied with more superficial answers, Mortmain, who has sacrificed everything to plumb the depths of the mystery, can be satisfied by nothing but an answer which penetrates to the core. Mortmain's is the eye that sees aright, and his vision beneath the mystic palm is the answer to what man may know.

That Mortmain alone of all the pilgrims is given such a vision and that this occurs three quarters of the way through the poem, poses a difficulty. What is the position of the hero, and what remains to be said in the last one hundred and sixty pages of the poem? Within the structure of the poem it is necessary to understand Mortmain's vision and death as an element subordinate to the experience and final posture of Clarel as hero. Because Mortmain is in character so much more vivid than Clarel, and because the quality of

his final experience is of such large import for the meaning of the quest, it is difficult to keep him in the minor role which the structure of the poem seems to demand. Clarel is too pallid a figure to claim our interest, and yet it must be recognized that even though he is not the controlling sensibility he is the formal link which binds all the elements of the poem together.

Since it is obvious from the beginning that Clarel is not of Mortmain's heroic stature, it should come as no great shock to find that at the end he undergoes no experience of full truth. He ends as he began, a lonely young man wandering disconsolately through the ruined Jerusalem. Yet the Clarel who waits alone in the ancient city of peace is a far different person from the inexperienced student who sailed from the New World determined to face his doubts and put his spiritual affairs in order.

In attempting to evaluate Clarel's apparent failure, it is necessary to keep in focus the fact that he represents the nineteenth century consciousness. His experiences, therefore, will be those faced by his contemporaries, and the pilgrims who surround him with their contrary postures are the attitudes which, taken compositely, form the climate of the nineteenth century world. Margoth explains everything in terms of scientific materialism, Ungar and Don Hannibal represent the reaction to political liberalism, Derwent indicates the easy poise of latitudinarianism, Vine recoils from the problems into an aesthetic tower, Rolfe explores with an objective curiosity the area of comparative religion, Nehemiah turns for salvation to a myopic reading of the Bible. In such a warring world and against such odds the nineteenth century consciousness must work out its precarious trail toward truth. In such a world what man will see aright? Mortmain, it is true, succeeded. But Mortmain was a

fanatical giant. What of the ordinary man, of the small sincere man who is admittedly influenced by the arguments about him and tempted by the comforts of ordinary social living? What happens to the nineteenth century consciousness?

To state the conclusion negatively is to indicate that Clarel does not capitulate to any of the specious postures with which he has been surrounded. Mortmain's vision has provided a conclusive answer to the problem of whether there exist spiritual values worth attaining. Clarel's problem is not the existence of such values but man's ability to retain them in a world which is increasingly beset with the perils of science, materialism, false sects, political liberalism, religious indifference. Looking at the final posture of Clarel, the answer to such a question seems to be equivocal. Clarel, although unsatisfied by any decisive conviction, continues to wander his solitary way through the streets of Jerusalem. The remainder of the pilgrims return homeward but Clarel waits on. There is, admittedly, nothing conclusive about such an ending. While it suggests the hope of a positive conclusion, it does not preclude the possibility that Clarel may, at any moment, pack his suitcase and return to the values he had once left. Is it possible for the nineteenth century consciousness to maintain its poise against the advancing tide of skepticism? Although the termination of the dramatic action indicates that such a victory is possible it does not do more. The few dedicated souls, like Mortmain and the monks of Saba, succeed; the sensuous cowards early desert the cause; but Clarel, like Starbuck in his imperilled boat, waits on, hoping against hope itself.¹⁸

Following the conclusion of the action, however, Melville

¹⁸Moby Dick, p. 185.

presents us with an Epilogue which is the last and perhaps the most important clue to the ultimate meaning of Clarel. The Epilogue is spoken by the basic narrative voice and endorses the final posture of the hero. Only if we accept these final lines as the last and deepest irony can we agree with Frank Griffith that the circular route of Clarel leads nowhere. Here are subsumed the basic tensions of the poem: science and faith, materialism and spiritual values, asceticism and the natural life, good and evil. All of these are included in the metaphor, the "running battle of the star and clod."

Yea, ape and angel, strife and old debate--
The harps of heaven and dreary gongs of hell;
Science the feud can only aggravate--
No umpire she betwixt the chimes and knell:
The running battle of the star and clod
Shall run for ever--if there be no God. (II, 297)

The opening lines of the Epilogue place the hero's problem in the largest possible terms:

If Luther's day expand to Darwin's year,
Shall that exclude the hope--foreclose the fear?

The lines which follow indicate an attempt to answer this query. Three personages appear in the subsequent passage: "the ancient Sphinx" who stands firm against the "claims our times avow"; Despair who scrawls his "bitter pasquinade" on the unyielding brow of the Sphinx, and bleeding Faith who turning from the scrawl, inscribes upon her broken urns "the sign o' the cross--the Spirit above the dust."

This unprepared for reference to the Sphinx presents difficulties of explication, but one may suggest that it represents the course of civilization over which Despair and Faith both battle. Despair, true to its nature, lampoons what it cannot believe in, but despite this attack the Sphinx remains unyielding. Pitted against Despair is Faith who also writes her testament, a testament diamet-

rically opposed to that of Despair. The testament of Faith is simply the sign of the cross. This is the running battle which Melville referred to in the lines previously quoted. This section of the Epilogue seems to reinforce the equivocal meaning of the dramatic action. So far neither Despair nor Faith has capitulated, but the conflict still continues. The remaining lines, however, indicate an optimism which the preceding argumentation has not prepared for, and which, for that reason, does not ring quite true to the major tonality of the poem. In these lines the narrative voice directs itself to the young hero:

Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-resigned--
 Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
 That like a crocus budding through the snow--
 That like a swimmer rising from the deep--
 That like a burning secret which doth go
 Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;
 Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,
 And prove that death but routs life into victory.
 (II, 298)

The last line comes as a disappointment to one who feels that Melville's unique quality is precisely his tough resistance to large platitudes. This is too close to Tennyson's mild suggestion to trust the larger hope, and too far from the probing and inconclusive argumentation of the whole poem to provide a satisfactory conclusion. Despite the explicit hopefulness of the ending of the Epilogue we are forced to agree with Walter Bezanson that the meaning of the Epilogue does not indicate a return to historical Christianity. Even though Melville makes use of such orthodoxly Christian terminology as faith, hope, the cross, he, nevertheless, does not accept the precision of meaning with which traditional Christianity endows them. Thus, in the use of the cross, he seems to have in mind not the historical fact of redemption but rather a general symbol of innocent suffering which may, perhaps, triumph over its persecutors--although such a

victory is in no sense assured.

Such a position, however, does represent a new perception of values and a more mature emotional approach than Melville had manifested in the novels immediately preceding Clarel (i.e. Pierre and The Confidence-Man). While the precision of orthodox theology is missing, there is at last no repudiation, but rather a large acceptance of some of the symbolic values of basic Christianity. Thus Melville accepts the necessity of faith in God, the positive value of suffering, the mystery of the cross, the place of Christ in the Christian dispensation.

Clarel, it must be conceded, is an inconclusive poem in many ways, and yet it represents an interesting shift in Melville's system of values. Having explored the intricate avenues of contemporary thought, Melville finds no positive answer to the question of what will happen to the nineteenth century consciousness. There is simply no other solution but to wait and see. Yet despite this equivocal conclusion, one must not lose sight of the shift toward optimism which the poem suggests.

Such a shift, as was suggested earlier, is away from a metaphysical problem and toward a psychological one. It is a commonplace to say that Melville is constantly concerned throughout his work with the metaphysical aspect of things: the existence of truth, of good, of suffering and evil, the existence of God and the philosophical implications of His existence. This is certainly the focal point of Mardi, Moby Dick, The Confidence-Man. And, if we take at face value the reasons which Clarel alleges for his quest (to face the "underformings in the mind," to "woo remote conclusions"), such metaphysical speculations will also be the focal point of Clarel. It is true that such speculations form the bulk of the poem. However,

what gives Clarel its peculiar coloring is the fact that such speculations are now considered under a new formality. Melville shifts from a preoccupation with metaphysics to psychology. The overwhelming concern in Clarel is not as much with the essences of things but with man's relationship and reaction to these essences.

Throughout the poem we are faced with the basic premise that there are certain absolute values which are worth a great price. Truth does exist, and provided a man is willing to make the necessary sacrifices he may have his vision. That Mortmain alone of all the pilgrims does enjoy the full vision of truth merely underscores the psychological aspect of Melville's problem. If one man achieves the goal, then the goal must exist and be possible of attainment. Of the other pilgrims it must be said that they failed in some way as questers. What of Clarel? He is neither victorious nor defeated. He waits on amid the conflicting thought of the nineteenth century. The vision has not failed. It is man who has failed and the world which man has shaped.

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